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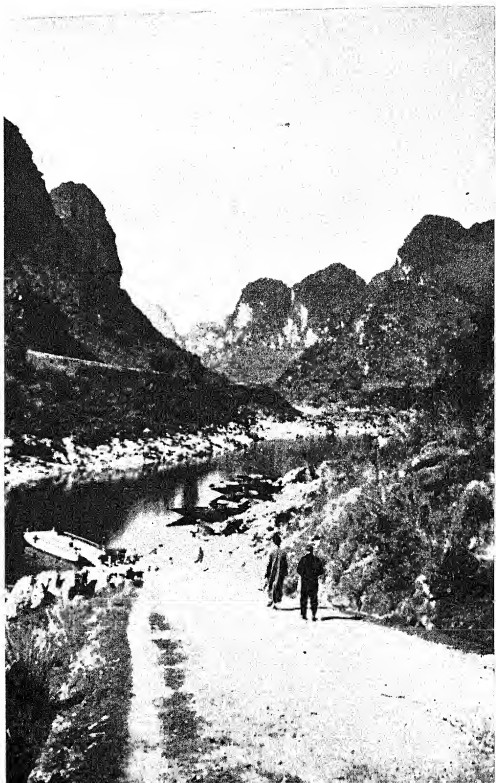
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I

JOURNEY OUT

I SAT back in my seat and the train glided out of Liverpool Street Station. The beery farewells of the Chaps from the Office died away with a tinkle of broken glass, and I looked round at my fellow occupants of the carriage. Opposite me sat three gentlemen, spectacled, brown, wrinkled as to the skin, small of stature, baggy-trouserred, eye-tilted. I leaned forward and said jovially, "Ah, gentlemen, no doubt we shall be travelling companions to China! I greatly admire your country." The three Japanese hissed and blinked, but said never a word.

It seems incredible to me now that anybody could be so ignorant as to mistake Japanese for Chinese, but I did it, and I suppose others may. I record it because that little story shows the state of mind in which I made my first approach to the East. I should have said it was an open mind. So it was, open and empty as an inverted colander. I had just, only just, got rid of the idea that the Chinese carved ivory and drank tea all the week, and got together at the local tong for a bit of refined torture on Saturday nights. I had a sort of idea that they were a misunderstood people, and that I should bring them a sympathy which they were not accustomed to find in my race. And that, not even knowing what they looked like! All I can say, looking back, is "What a nerve!"

Twenty-two is a very defensive age. On the one hand I was all aglow with inner excitement at the prospect of going half round the world in a train and living among the yellow men. On the other hand I was damped down by a stern determination to be surprised at nothing and put upon by nobody. So I was not surprised, as we dashed across Holland and the flat West of Germany next morning, to observe, lurking in the corridor, an unmistakable adventuress.

Secure in my hard-boiled maturity, I raised my eyebrow in response to the next flash of black eyes, and in she walked,

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silver fox fur, black cape, veil, ebony cigarette-holder and a . . . So far so good. We sat down and talked. It did not take very long to find out that, far from being an adventuress, she was an unhappy woman and just plain lonely. She told such a sad, silly story : of a lover she had nursed through a long illness, who had gone to England promising to send for her, of increasing gaps between letters, of evasions and lies. Finally she had gone to London herself to spy on him, found exactly what she most feared and least desired, confronted and upbraided him and cried and bought a new fur and come home, and *what* was I going to do in Berlin? We agreed to wander around the town together, but were met at the station by the inevitable "friend", one Blümchen by name, whose feelings must not be hurt. She stuck to us like a shadow, chattering volubly except when she espied a Jew — not a rare event in Berlin in 1936 — whereupon she hissed and spat like a bad dragon, rolling her eyes and crossing herself and using whatever took to be the most dreadful language. When we got rid of Blümchen at last my adventuress announced her intention of coming with me to Shanghai, and our parting at the "Zoo" station was too painful to be described.

It seemed incredible that the very next day should bring us to the Russian frontier (April 1, 1936) and all the well-known impediments which greet the visitor to that country. Many others have described them, and apart from mentioning that a book of comic (non-political) cartoons nearly caused an arrest and one poor fellow missed the connection because there was not enough time for all his collections of Charlie Kunz gramophone records to be played through in front of the censor, I will not dwell on the tiresome formalities. It was, anyway, a sad thing to leave my luxurious *wagon-lit* for the more austere comfort of the Trans-Siberian Railway, but I soon settled down in my coupé, and went to the dining-car to eye my fellow passengers over a first sample of vodka and caviare. Neither the remoteness nor the immediate view pleased me very much. Even on the first day the caviare was not very good, the vodka not of the best : and where, oh where were the Shanghai Lilies, the international spies, crooks and diplomats? Beckenham itself could not have marshalled a more respectable, middle-class, downright plain collection of citizens. There were two Danes, o

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silver fox fur, black cape, veil, ebony cigarette-holder and all. So far so good. We sat down and talked. It did not take me very long to find out that, far from being an adventuress, she was an unhappy woman and just plain lonely. She told such a sad, silly story : of a lover she had nursed through a long illness, who had gone to England promising to send for her ; of increasing gaps between letters, of evasions and lies. Finally she had gone to London herself to spy on him, found exactly what she most feared and least desired, confronted and upbraided him and cried and bought a new fur and come home, and *what* was I going to do in Berlin? We agreed to go around the town together, but were met at the station by the inevitable "friend", one Blümchen by name, whose feelings must not be hurt. She stuck to us like a shadow, chatting volubly except when she espied a Jew — not a rare event in Berlin in 1936 — whereupon she hissed and spat like a baby dragon, rolling her eyes and crossing herself and using what I took to be the most dreadful language. When we got rid of Blümchen at last my adventuress announced her intention of coming with me to Shanghai, and our parting at the "Zoo" station was too painful to be described.

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elderly, one young, ultra-British in manner as Danes always are in my experience ; a young Frenchman going out to work in his father's motor business in Shanghai ; a young Chinese returning from studies in Europe — a very vague youth this, always losing his tickets and his camera and his walking-stick. There was a Dutch Jew of aspect so repulsive that he would make *Der Stürmer's* caricatures look like Bernard Partridge's most high-minded cartoons — a paunchy reptile with a permanent drip on his nose and fingers like ill-filled sausage-skins which engulfed numerous rings ; a German *frau* in the late thirties — childless, which does not suit German wives, an unlovable creature who was always cutting in at the head of queues with loud cries, more than once to be sent ignominiously back to the end by strong-minded officials, to the unholy joy of her fellow passengers ; and a young man from Liverpool whom I labelled as a *thé dansant* type. His clothes were natty : socks, tie and handkerchief to match. His overcoat was flatteringly broad at the shoulders and rather too long, and he wore his "business" handkerchief up his sleeve, and when other people were stamping furiously up and down platforms to warm their feet he did a little tap-dance by himself, to the wonder and delight of stray peasants or children who had wandered down to the station to see the train. Nevertheless I think he showed a spark of greatness : he had lived all his twenty-five years in an English city — he was an electrical engineer — and when I asked him how he felt about living the next few years in Tientsin he just said, "It's all the same to me," and went on reading *Tit-Bits*. Which, spoken straight from his English heart, made the studied enthusiasms or indifference of the rest of us look rather silly. My three Japanese acquaintances were still with us, of course, and I bitterly regretted my early *gaffe* when I observed that each little man came to every meal carrying a little bottle of German beer. I felt I could have taken a liking to so discriminating and so provident a company — increasingly so as the tolerable beer with which our tiny bar was stocked gave way to local brews purchased at remote stations. Finally there was the Belgian family, consisting of a brave, tired little wisp of a woman with three strapping daughters, all apparently at that extensive and elastic age known as awkward, and a villainous small boy who exploited

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cynically all the weaknesses of the petticoat hierarchy above him.

So much for the passengers. Not very much chance of a murder there, I thought : but as I looked out of the window and saw the beginnings of snow — not just ordinary English snow but real no-compromise snow of Russian fiction, my heart rose again and I struggled through an execrable stew with the growing conviction that anything might happen. As a matter of fact, it didn't. I looked forward eagerly to seeing the Volga. I already knew from bitter experience that the Danube was not invariably blue, but I was not quite prepared to see, not only no sturdy fur-clad boatmen doing a Musical Row, but in fact no boatmen at all, only a few unhappy old women washing clothes by holes in the ice. Still, nobody who had been to an English University in the early 'thirties could help feeling a certain tremor of excitement at the prospect of seeing Moscow, where we were due to arrive at lunch-time on our second day in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

I am glad I never posed as an authority on Russia. In common with other Englishmen, I harboured a mass of confused ideas on the subject, starting with a little girl called Gerda, in Hans Andersen, whom I loved and always regarded wrongly as Russian in my childhood, passing through the bloody revolutionary era (regarded subconsciously from the Royalist viewpoint of the average schoolboy) and the dimly recollected Arcos and "No Soviet Petrol Sold Here" and Vickers trials period, to the more recent days when Russia was increasingly reflected in English politics. The Russians seemed to have achieved in recent history that unprecedented triumph of enigma — to fool all the people all the time. Moscow was something to everybody ; the hell of Cheltenham and employers of labour, the capital of Bloomsbury, the holiday resort of lady politicians and eccentric playwrights, the heaven of the October Club and other enthusiasts. I hoped at last to get for myself a portion of truth from Russia. Like my many distinguished predecessors, I got nothing of the sort.

To start with, it had begun to thaw. No city has a fair chance to show itself off under a coating of dirty slush, and this handicap was particularly severe on Moscow, whose streets were full of enormous pot-holes, and whose buildings seemed

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to be half in the process of demolition and half of erection. We were bounced round in a dilapidated bus presided over by a female guide who talked to us in the pathetic sing-song of the professional quoter. We saw the important public buildings, the Red Square (very big and muddy), the Anti-God Museum (very baroque) and, above (or below) all, the Underground Railway. It was, we thought, a nice little Underground as far as it went (not very far, by the way), but not impressive to those who had braved the teeming mazes of the London equivalent or the more temperamental gyrations of the Paris Metro. Finally we were taken to see the Biggest Building in the World. Here at last, we thought, is something to write home about, something colossal, the steam-roller touch (hitherto, alas, conspicuous only by its absence). But I doubt if any of us was really surprised, on arriving at the site of this architectural monster, to find that the building of it was scheduled to begin any day from now!

There was nothing in the shops, clothes were shabby and subfusc (perhaps because it was the end of the season) and nobody smiled. I don't mean nobody laughed — you might walk a long way through Manchester or Huddersfield on a cold day without hearing roars of laughter — but nobody even smiled, as much as to say "thank you", or "pleased to see you", or "pork sausages? — what a hope!" So it was a relief to be allowed a few minutes off to gaze at the Kremlin. Very unreal it looked across the water, with its shimmering battlements and onion domes. Like a back-curtain to a scene — and the wrong scene, at that. Such frivolity and grace were out-of-place where both man's extravagance and God's benevolence are taboo. At that moment I saw a little boy, like a rabbit in fur cap, coat and gloves, gazing at me sternly. I put my fingers in my eyes and made a horrible face at him, whereupon a delighted smile made his little face the first human thing I had seen in Moscow. How wrong I was. If only I had seen cunning where I thought I saw *naïveté*, grim determination where I saw apathy and depression; if I had looked more at the modest building blocks that were complete and less at the mighty ones in embryo. . . . But, thank goodness again, I wasn't the only one.

Back in the train again we composed ourselves for the ordeal

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coal. We then returned for the Russian, who had been all this time talking furiously to himself in his native language, gesticulating wildly and running his hands through his shock of hair. As we arrived he uttered a despairing remark (I think it was "I shall never get back to Omsk"), and with a last wave and a valedictory flash of his passionate eyes he plunged beneath the table and was seen no more. He was probably just as comfortable there as in the third class, which is actually called Hard Class, so we left him — Marcel for his forbidding and mummified concubine, I for my lonely couch, which I found had added gyration to its other movements. Perhaps the anti-Christians use rather more of their national emblem, the pine tree, in their distilling processes than the Benedictine Brothers would approve.

The next day hung fire. The train, which was eventually eighteen hours late, moved only by fits and starts. The pine tree and snow motif had by now given place to a dull red landscape equally monotonous, and though the participants in last night's celebration had a feeling that they had done their duty to the community by having a winding-up party, they had their worries. The natty suiting, for example, was natty no longer, and its owner was also being harassed by a black-mailing attempt by the attendants to fine him twenty-five roubles for clearing-up charges. I am glad to say that we Western Europeans closed our ranks round him and corporatively refused to allow him to pay a single copeck. We had all, moreover, nerved ourselves for the awful effort of arriving, which I always find the worst part of any journey longer than the silly little hops that pass for travel in the British Isles. As long as one is in motion one is gloriously free of the world and its trammels. One has as much responsibility for one's own destiny as that other circumnavigator, the moon, and can look out on the changing panorama of the world with the same cynical detachment. Arrival spells care. Arriving at Manchuli on the Manchukuo frontier was no exception. Bustle and confusion, passports and Customs, somewhere to sleep. We had missed yesterday's connection and today's, and most of us slept uneasily in a still, unlighted train. The Jew, driven by dark unfathomable impulses that I do not understand, went to a hotel and slept, he told me, with a black woman. Next day

JOURNEY OUT

we saw the last of this character, and I always feel I should apologise to the whole Jewish race for having met him. No people is more consistently unfortunate in its ambassadors. Two good things happened in the turmoil and mess at Manchuli which, small in their way, were significant of the things in store. The first was the discovery of Capstan cigarettes on the station, product of the Company I had come so far to serve, selling moreover at a price undreamed of at home — a shilling, I think, for a tin of fifty. The second was the porters, big strapping Manchurian Chinese in light-blue cotton pyjamas with a splash of red somewhere. They came up with their carrying-poles and hooked and looped staggering loads to both ends. I felt sure, when they had hoisted the poles to their shoulders, they would never be able to walk. They did not walk. They ran.

The next phase of this journey was ugly, and even so insular and insensitive a nostril as mine could not altogether ignore the aroma of tragedy and hate. We pattered behind a defective engine over the illimitable drab Manchurian plain, newly emerged from snow and showing as yet no sign of its great fertility. In the train we were overcrowded and cross, and the Japanese guards made us nervous. At one stage we were made to close the window blinds, and rumours sprang to life — we were passing a battlefield — guerrillas were attacking the train : the German lady verged on hysteria (indeed it was not a pleasant thing to be shut in against the unknown by no more solid a bulwark than a blind) and some of the awkward girls began to cry. (We heard afterwards that two car-loads of Japanese dead and wounded were being attached to the train.) We were all impatient, as I am now as I write, to get on to China. So I will record briefly the few impressions that stick vividly in my memory of my first glimpse of Imperial Japan. Harbin, a dead city already, shops mostly closed, White Russians wandering disconsolate and ill-found. A handful of Europeans waiting at the dusty little golf-course they had built for the Japanese players to get a move on. A Chinese carter being arrested by a Japanese policeman because a small Japanese boy had run into the cart and bent his shiny begadgeted bicycle. My kind American host moved with an armed Russian bodyguard. An English child had been kidnapped on her way to school.

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We passed straight through Moukden, and the next thing I remember is the body of a Chinese being removed from the steps of the nice clean Yamato hotel, where he had been shot. We drove down to the sea, passed the almost headless trunk of a coolie, run over apparently and left for the flies. These were the first remains of violent death that I had seen and I did not like it very much, but I enjoyed my walk in the sea air and returned refreshed. I did not know then what I know now about Japanese Imperialism. Emilio Vespa's book, called, I think, *Secret Agent of Japan*, is the best document I know on the rape of Manchuria, our blindness to which at the time was the first step in the crime for which we are now so bitterly atoning. Japan was filling already with German technical and military advisers. I wonder if the Japanese sent to Germany advisers on "Honourable Behaviour in Conquered Countries"?

Only two days by sea, now, and then Shanghai. Lovely blue sea at first, but on the second day a Frenchman seized my arm and said, "There ! there's China for you !" A short distance away, as if bounded by a submarine wall, the blue sea ended and the brown muddy waters that gave the Yellow Sea its name began. Land was still out of sight, but as we ploughed through the turgid salt soup I realised that we were on, or in, Chinese soil at last. As night fell, seventeen days from Liverpool Street, we slid into the imperceptible mouth of the Whangpoo where it joins the Yangtse estuary. I saw for the first time flat fields painted with the delicate green of young rice, and standing in the midst, symbolic, I felt, of all I had come here to represent, the new among the old, the garish ephemeral works of man braving the quiet permanence of Nature, trade rooted in the soil — a great neon advertisement sign in the agonised contortion of a Chinese character.



HONAN

I ONLY spent a short week-end in Shanghai at this time and, as it is too great a city to be taken in in less than months, I shall not generalise about it at this stage. I went into Head Office, was introduced to the "big shots" and duly asked to lunch. Everyone was very kind. I had brought a letter of introduction from somebody I had never met, and a ring on the telephone brought me an invitation to Sunday lunch. That was my best day for a long time. The family was friendly and full of fun, there were narcissi in the big garden only a few miles from the Nanking road, and the roast beef and, later, tea in the garden awoke in me feelings of nostalgia which had hitherto been stunned by the quick succession of new experiences. I felt as if I had caught a glimpse of myself in a looking-glass after a long time, and fortified with this picture I embarked at night on the flower of the Yangtse fleet, the new Jardine's steamer *Kung Wo*. She was a fine commodious vessel, but with the rather anaemic indoor air that characterises river steamers in contrast to deep-water vessels. Life was very quiet for those four days. The Yangtse rolled silently past, not apparently getting any smaller after the first day. I was in fact rather lonely and was befriended by an American Consular official's wife and her small daughter, who was at anything but an awkward age. She was called Marjorie Lee, and trampled all over me. I was frequently lectured by the purser, an enormous man who had been many years on the river and was not at all pleased with the way things were going. He said that with so many unemployed British people already in China, he could not see why the firms wanted to bring out new chaps like me — no offence, mind you. Business was dead, it seemed — largely due to the recent (and brilliant) achievement of Sir Frederick Leith-Ross in stabilising the Chinese dollar with the English pound. The result of this intolerable meddling was that nobody could get rich by gambling on the dollar, and one

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gathered that this disaster had reduced the national wealth to a fraction. Indeed, I had met this unorthodox theory of economics in Shanghai already, and had not argued the point (wisely, as it turned out ; authority on all subjects in China is in direct ratio to seniority). However, the purser told me many hair-raising stories of what he had done to smugglers, stow-aways, etc., and if he was as tough as he said, and if pursers have to be tough, he was a very good purser indeed.

Hankow announced itself, as most other Treaty Ports do to the approaching visitor, by its installations. An installation is a cluster of tanks, warehouses and workshops, the property of the Asiatic Petroleum Company, the Standard Oil Company or of their lesser rival the Texas Company. These companies are very important, both socially and economically, to foreign trade in China, and they will recur in these pages under their nicknames or initials. One approaches the port — Hankow, Canton, Changsha, Shanghai, many others I daresay — along the river, as it were up the drive, and the installations guard the approaches. After them came big warehouses (henceforth "godowns", heaven knows why) and factories, and before I realised it we were moored off the Bund with the Customs House and its clock on the left and a substantial row of banks, offices and blocks of flats before us. The Yangtse seemed wider than ever, and quite stole the picture ; the junks, the imper-tinent steamers, the solid buildings and hurrying citizens all played their part, but the river was the thing. I suppose it is quite half a mile wide here, and I never failed to feel a little jump in the heart when I saw an ocean-going ship, perhaps with an English flag and a blue funnel, loaded up with the immeasurable produce of the Middle Kingdom, swinging round in the current to begin its long journey ; past the million rice fields and the thriving cities, under the indifferent gaze of the Chinese and the hot, jealous regard of half a dozen white men, dipping its flag to a foreign gunboat and swerving to give way to a sail — down to the sea at last, and then in one long hop over all the blue water in the world to Liverpool. I admired the men in the ships all the more because I was afraid of the Yangtse, even then.

My first encounter was ill-omened. I was met on the wharf by a very charming young man in a very bad nervous state.

HONAN

He had been in Manchukuo, where two months before he had been involved innocently in a brawl with some drunken Japanese soldiers. He was taken away by the police, who, well aware of his nationality, broke his leg and beat him up in prison, kicked him in the groin as he lay helpless on the floor, and released him three days later. Now he was going home. The British response to this affront was a Question asked in Parliament. I was taken along to the mess, where half a dozen or so of the Company's young men lived in a good flat overlooking the river. I was taken to the office and introduced to the "big shots", and duly asked to lunch, and everybody was very kind. The foreign community at that time was quite big. There were, I believe, 400-odd members of the Country Club, where there were races and polo and tennis and all the other games you can think of. Apart from these solid citizens there were hundreds of other foreigners of all nationalities, especially Russians of course, but the tone of the place was predominantly British — and predominantly suburban.

At first I did not like Hankow at all. It seemed to me unutterably smug and narrow and self-satisfied and second-rate. I had brought with me a lot of undergraduate ideas about the British abroad and his stupidity and dullness and lack of understanding of, and respect for, native peoples and their institutions, and in this little provincial town with its billiard tables and its boys and its exclusiveness and its arrogance I thought I had found the actuality. I looked for the romance of trade and found the Hankow Chamber of Commerce. I looked for the spirit of adventure and found the back-slapping inanity of the Rotary Club. I continued to think on these lines for quite a long time.

So much for the Bund and the two or three streets behind it on the north bank; but this foreign area is, as I was to discover, only a fraction of the city of Hankow. There are really three cities. Hankow proper is where I landed, and is the most modern and up-to-date area. There is one handsome street of tall modern Chinese shops, and near the river to the west of the Foreign Settlement is a thick network of narrow streets where the real business of the city is done. On the south bank is the city of Wuchang, which is a purely Chinese city and the

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seat of the Hupeh Provincial Government. Back on the north side again, where the Han river joins the Yangtse (Han Kow means "Mouth of the Han") is the third and smallest city, Hanyang, which consists of ironworks and one very long rambling street.

About the first thing that happens to the young cigarette merchant is to be told to "get out on the market". This means trudging through the hot crowded streets, saying hullo to, and perhaps taking a cup of tea with, the dealers, chatting to the wayside hawkers, checking prices always and keeping an eye open for any significant change in the popularity of our own and our competitors' brands. The cigarette trade in China is very active and very complex and a foreign company has to be wide awake if it is to hold its own against the numerous Chinese companies. At that time a big proportion of our business was done, in the last instance, in piece-lots; that is to say, a hawker with a tray or stand by the wayside would sell cigarettes one at a time to the passers-by. A Chinese dollar was worth one shilling and threepence and there were from 600 to 800 coppers to a dollar, the exchange rate varying from town to town and month to month. In one town the standard copper coin might be worth five "coppers" or fifty "cash"; in the next, worth only two coppers or twenty cash; and it makes all the difference, in China, if you can sell cigarettes at one for a copper when your competitors are asking three coppers for two. The turnover was enormous, and the competition among the bigger dealers reached a murderous pitch. At one time they were buying a case of 50,000 cigarettes from us, and selling it at one dollar less than they paid us because they could dispose of the empty tin-lined case for \$1.50! All this, by the way, among our own dealers, fighting not against our rivals but among themselves. A Chinese family does not cost very much to maintain, but a profit of $7\frac{1}{2}$ d. on 50,000 cigarettes was overdoing it. Several of them went bankrupt, and afterwards perhaps they were a little more sensible. All this is intended to give some idea of what I was actually doing in China, and of the terrifying sensitiveness of the market in which we were dealing. A shortening of the copper exchange, due to the demands for cash after the harvest was in, might put one of our staple brands out of its correct price-class overnight.

HONAN

A five-dollar increase in 50,000 from the factory might mean five dollars per month less to the hawker — who can buy a month's rice for himself and his family for that sum. I soon became, and I remain, a great admirer of the men who sustain the continuous burden of this exacting trade and make a lot of money out of it — for the shareholders, and eventually for England.

I was not kept long in Hankow. Young men, said the Company, having Got Out on the Market, must Get Out in the Field. The particular field selected for my pasture was Honan province, north of Hankow, and my base was to be Chengchow. I was to live with another young man, who would Show me the Ropes. I enquired about this man Dudley, and heard alarming reports. Very British, they said, hearty, with a big moustache, keen on exercise, does P.T. before breakfast, etc. One of the Divisional Managers actually suggested that I should take along a set of boxing gloves. Luckily I did not do so (he might have been bigger than me), and anyway any more dangerous present to two young men, cooped up together day after day, in heat and dust and boredom, than boxing gloves I cannot imagine. I am sure only one of us would have been alive today.

Dudley met me at the station at Chengchow, took me home through the dark city (it was 2 A.M.) in a silent ricksha, and showed me a whisky-and-soda and my room. Emboldened by the whisky, I asked him if it would be all right if I did not get up for P.T. in the morning. He started like a horse that has seen a snake, then roared with laughter, and immediately we were good friends. Next morning I had a look round my new pasture, and my heart sank, as it does even now at the thought of that unspeakable town. Chengchow is, and always will be until the Yellow river shows a little sense and washes it away, absolutely bloody. Unlike most towns, especially in China, it has no natural reason for its existence. It is a tenth-rate Chinese Crewe, sprawling around the crossroads of the two big railways, Kin-Han and Lung-Hai. The Kin-Han runs north and south between Peking and Hankow, a 600-mile run with Chengchow half way. The Lung-Hai starts on the east coast somewhere — Tsingtao I suppose — and runs beyond Chengchow to Sianfu and points west. I do not know how far

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it goes. Chinese railways never stop unless they are pulled up cold by the sea or the capital or another railway that they cannot cross. The map is always out of date — a thick black line, "completed"; a thinner line, "under construction"; and finally a little skeleton like, "projected". It would not surprise me in the least if one day some little brown men in blue cotton trousers popped out of a tunnel on the southern slopes of the Himalayas and, under the impression that they were still in some outlandish province of the Middle Kingdom, asked the local tribesmen for the favour of a few handfuls of rice.

So Chengchow is a railway station with a few streets of shoddy houses scattered around it. The streets are not paved, but consist of loose deep dust when it is dry and enveloping mud after half an hour's rain. Vehicular traffic consists of bullock-carts and wheelbarrows (there is no road leading anywhere). Mangy dogs and mangy children roam the streets, and at least half the population sleeps at night in row upon row on the pavements, if I am so to designate the margins of the roads. Our flat was, I am grateful to say, a good one, forming the upper story of the only foreign building in town, erected by the American Oil people. They did not have a foreign representative in Chengchow. Nor did anyone else with any sense. There were some great trees in our compound, in which a golden oriole sometimes sat and derided us with its particular noise, half whistle and half crow. We had running water when the pump worked and electric fans and lights when the power station worked, which I suppose was actually most of the time, so theoretically we "couldn't complain". Overhead always the kites wheeled and screeched (we had another name for them) — a tragic bird, a broken gentleman, with the body of an eagle and a jackal's soul.

Dudley took me to call on the Mission. They were very kind, and though they did not ask us to lunch, they insisted on our being included in their annual photograph, a magnificent panorama comprising all the inmates and staff of their church, hospital and school. I liked the old doctor at once, but was less taken with his subordinate, an anaemic, pince-nez American who said Howdy! and told us what a lot of furlough he had and what a lot of gold dollars he drew. Our only other

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social contacts were very occasional visits to the Scottish manager of a cotton-packing factory at the other side of the town and a Belgian official of the Lung-Hai railway.

It soon appeared that there was not going to be very much for me to do. The country round was infested with bandits, and we had to keep within the railway zone, so the only thing for me, having cast an eye over the local market and office routine, was to get into the train and go on visits to other cities. These visits were very similar, and I will not detail all of them. They served their purpose, which was to give me an idea of the feel, so to speak, of China, and let me learn how to behave by observing the Chinese around me. These North China people are incredibly generous and warm-hearted, and even if I had not intended to before I saw them, I should have liked them immediately. I will outline briefly one of these trips, down South to Sinyangchow, where I went several times.

I set off usually at some unearthly hour of the night by train, with my travelling boy, Chin. I was just beginning to get used to this individual, not having been reared to employ a gentleman's gentleman, and it still annoyed me to hear him fussing around in my bedroom before I got up; still — *noblesse oblige* — my "face" demanded that I have a servant, and the Company paid. He was young for the job, only a few years older than I, and had learned pidgin English as a servant on a British gunboat. He was definitely a gentleman of consequence in the third class, in his clean grey robe and Homburg hat, and he looked after my property with meticulous care.

This was a journey of ten hours or so, and some of that was likely to be daylight. The view from the window was always the same — one could get into the train at eight in the evening, and the aspect next morning would be apparently identical. This is part of the great central plain of China, the most fertile region of the world. I remember it particularly at harvest time. There are no hedges or fences, because there are no cattle except the faithful water buffalo. There would be a few groves of trees in sight, harbouring a tiny village or temple, but for the rest, China was one field. In the foreground were men, women and children, in their blue cotton clothes, working at the corn, the lordly *kaoliang* (a kind of maize) or other grains, reaping or setting up the stocks. The middle distance was the

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same, on a smaller scale — a green floor, with tiny dots of men scattered unevenly yet consistently like currants in a cake, flies on a tea-shop table. The far distance began to be hazy, but it was all the same, a study in perspective, a picture of Infinity. As at sea on a clear day, the horizon was limited not by any physical barrier but by the curvature of the earth. How many miles could I see? How many people were in sight at one moment? I did not know, could not imagine. These were infinites, like ants and grains of sand, or stars, that one just does not count. They say that the American, Mr. J. B. Duke, when they brought him a machine that would make as many cigarettes in a minute as a man had hitherto made in an hour, said, "Bring me the atlas". When they brought it he turned over the leaves, looking not at the maps but at the significant figures at the bottom, until he came to the legend, "Pop. : 430,000,000". "That", he said, "is where we are going to sell cigarettes." When they told him the Chinese did not smoke cigarettes, he said he supposed they could learn. In the best season I can remember, our Company alone sold six thousand five hundred million cigarettes in China in a month. I should like to have had the great man beside me as I stood on the end platform of a carriage rattling across the mighty field, or on many occasions when I watched the smile of content spring to the face of a farmer after a day in the fields, a workman at the end of his labours, a ricksha man at the end of a long pull, as he lovingly lit up his cigarette and inhaled the grateful fumes.

I would be met at the station by our Chinese District Manager, with a couple of grinning sales-coolies to help with the baggage, and at this particular town invariably by the dealer himself, Mr. Yu. Yu was a grand old man, fat and sturdy, with the traditional grey or black long gown, made of cotton or silk in the summer but lined with fur in the winter, with an inadequate Homburg perched on his bald dome, and a stout foreign walking-stick. Yu had been a great brandy drinker in his day, a two-bottle man at least, but lately, on the advice of his doctor, had discarded that beverage in favour of mother's milk, which he extracted twice daily from a series of wet-nurses. They had every reason to be proud of the sleek, healthy appearance of their senile nursing. My first act, after

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greeting the reception committee in order of importance, would be to thank the dealer for bothering to come down to the station. And here I should like to say once and for all that the popular conception of the "exaggerated politeness" current among the Chinese is nonsense. Perhaps this idea is fostered by the word which is translated as "honourable", in Chinese the simple monosyllable "*kwei*", which has about the same significance as the "dear sir" with which we address total strangers, our worst enemies, anybody in fact who is not dear to us. Whatever the source of the fiction, it is one I should like to dispel. The Chinese have good manners; all the Chinese, not just the wealthy and educated; and their innate self-respect is the guarantee of their behaviour. As long as the ricksha-puller remembers his manners he is as good a man as the fat merchant in the ricksha. If either behaves in a vulgar and unseemly fashion, showing temper or discourtesy (outside the bounds of bargaining patter), he loses face, which is the respect of others and the main pillar of the vital self-respect. In the display of politeness there is nothing extravagant: common courtesy and hospitality and deference to age are the keynotes of Chinese behaviour. The Europeans, in glamourising their women and raising them to an artificial status in respect of consideration and privilege in the community, have lost something in the way of manners. For example, if a young man gives up his seat in the bus to a woman, it is the automatic gesture of the humble man to the creature of more delicate sensibilities than himself, a tribute too often regarded as a right. But if he gives up his seat to an older man, he makes a gesture that will not be so quickly forgotten. Good manners, exerted between men exclusively, immediately induce a state of affairs as near to civilisation as makes no difference, and when I thank the dealer for putting himself out for a man of a third of his age and a twentieth of his wealth, and insist that he go out of the station gate in front of me (if I can), I immediately feel all right, and he feels all right, and the bystanders who are watching this phenomenal appearance at the station see that everything is in order, and they feel pretty good too. The Chinese are as embarrassed by the shortcomings of a stranger as we may be when we watch an incompetent performance on the stage.

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From the station we would proceed to the dealer's shop, to sit down for a cup of tea and a Three Castles cigarette and a chat about business and general conditions. I often found this stage the most difficult, racking my brains for something to say, pouring with sweat and longing for a wash and a change after my journey, yet not daring to be too precipitate. The Chinese are quite happy to sit, even in company, chewing sunflower seeds and gazing silently into space, but I could not get away from a feeling that it was my duty as a guest to entertain and be entertained. Eventually relief would come, Chin to say my room was ready, or some other diversion, and the party would break up.

While I was engaged on my toilet, or just breathing heavily and cursing the flies, one would come bearing invitations to dinner: little pink slips, stating the time and restaurant appointed, accompanied sometimes by a list of all the guests. No written acceptance is required. If one is able to go, one goes. If not, that is if one is out of town, one does not go. One does not plead a previous engagement, unless one is host: if two dinners clash, go to both and eat half of each.

Chinese dinner parties are unique in the world's social functions inasmuch as the sole purpose is that everyone should have as good a time as possible, and all the arrangements are directed to that end. The dinner is held invariably at a restaurant, where the guests can eat of the best and make as much noise and mess as they like without offending anybody or disturbing the children. No "ladies" are present — that is to say, nobody's wife or daughter or fiancée. Feminine society is provided by sing-song girls, who are "called" by chit from the houses where they dwell, after the dinner has begun, and sit on stools each behind her respective host. The guests arrive one by one, and there is another of those tiresome periods when everyone sips tea and cracks sunflower seeds. The hiatus may extend to ten minutes or three hours. If an important guest is late, the party waits until he comes. The good host sends his servants with lamps to fetch his guests, but even this does not assure punctuality. The guests at Sinyangchow were my host's cousin, who was a magistrate, the station-master, who was "used to foreigners" and spoke a little French, the A.P.C. dealer, our office staff and other odds and

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ends — the social cream, in fact, of the town. When at last the first dish was ready, we sprang forward with sudden animation, and began an argument about not sitting in the place of honour, which actually usually fell in the end to me. We then helped each other to take coats off, and settled down. The calling of the girls always caused a lot of back-chat and badinage. This area, rich in hospitality, was poor in girls, and I was particularly unfortunate. The function of the sing-song girl, who may or may not be a prostitute, is to be pretty and witty as well as to sing. Each town usually had a No. 1 sing-song girl, an eminence achieved by accumulation of gold teeth in front, long experience of the local gossip, and a natural and powerful voice. It was again and again my bad luck to have this dignitary "called" for my personal delectation, and to suffer her senior charms of denture, chatter and shrillness while gazing jealously at the inferior flower-like girls, some of them so inferior that they had all their own teeth and never sang at all, who festooned the less honourable guests. The party, like all good parties, from a quiet beginning rapidly began to work itself up. Rice wine was served profusely from little kettles in which it was warmed. The glasses were small, but the devices to compel one to drink heavily were legion. To start with, there were polite toasts to host and guests, and a toast to each successive dish. Then, if one's "girl" sang a song, which someone was bound to ask her to do sooner or later, one was expected to drink with every guest in turn, and always the cry was "Gambei!" or "Bottoms Up!" (I was usually glad of this stiffening during these interludes: I would rather have a steam whistle in my ear than some of those high-powered nightingales.) Finally there were games, especially the famous finger-game, which leads to much shouting, loud cries of triumph and roars of applause as the loser drinks a full cup. As dish followed dish — soup, bamboo-shoots, meat balls, chicken boiled so soft that even I could tear off a bit of meat with my chopsticks, shark's fins, duck, perhaps a sucking-pig, a big fish brought in alive and cooked in delicate ways according to the recommendation of the party, finally rice if anybody had any room — the fun rose to a peak of enjoyment. Everybody was gloriously happy, it was a successful party. The arrival of the rice was the signal for the removal of the wine,

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none too soon, for though the Chinese generally have no great capacity, they make it a point of honour to blackmail the foreigner into excess. And so thanks and compliments and off to bed.

My next day or two, at this leisurely period, would be spent in checking stocks, wandering round the market, visiting the local beauty spot if any, generally getting the feel of the town. Sinyangchow did not feel too good. The crops were only moderate, bandits were active only a short distance out of town, and there was a lot of destitution. My visits in this area always included a call on the local Tax Bureau to protest against hand-rolling. This was a depressing and futile business. Much of the tobacco in China is grown in this region, largely from stock for which we originally supplied the seed from America, and the cigarettes rolled by little gadgets at street corners, or by hand-operated machines out in the bandit-ridden hills, were making great inroads on our business. Of course it was illegal, as the rollers were evading tax ; but on the one hand it went against the grain to demand the arrest of some poor destitute who was earning a few coppers a day by this means, and on the other hand it was all so futile — it would have taken an expeditionary force to eradicate the illicit trade in the country as long as the Japanese smugglers kindly provided the paper. Out of sheer cussedness I used to try to bully the corrupt and indolent tax officials into taking action of some kind, but it was a tiring exercise and never got anybody anywhere. On my last day it would be my turn to give a party, jollier than ever now that we all knew each other, and next morning some of my new friends, as well as the dealer and *entourage*, might come to see me into the train.

So off I went to repeat the process elsewhere, acquiring each time a little more *savoir-faire*, a little better judgement of the Chinese and their capacities. There were three main-line towns south of Chengchow, and others, where the expresses did not stop, that I visited in cattle-trucks and brake-vans on the casual trains. All were much the same. Hot dusty streets, crammed on market-days with people, bullock-carts and wheel-barrows, and always my personal following of filthy children with scabs on their faces and scum in their eyes. It was not all beer and skittles, and I did not always feel very well. Chinese

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ceremonial food is not designed to be taken regularly, as I took it with my almost daily feasts. Vegetables, especially greens, are excluded as being too ordinary, and you need a stomach trained from birth to cope with rice. I went to Kaifeng, to the east, a handsome city with a history and a university and some ancient pagodas, with more beggars in the streets than I had seen elsewhere. I went to Loyang, in the west, past an extraordinary geological formation called *loess*. This is a great deposit of brown mud, left, I suppose, by the Yellow river in a past age, which sprawls in terraced and castellated hills along the south bank. A special breed of men have sprung up, like mites in cheese, who live in caves in the *loess*. Back in Chengchow I had a bath and a drink and tried to write down what I had learned.

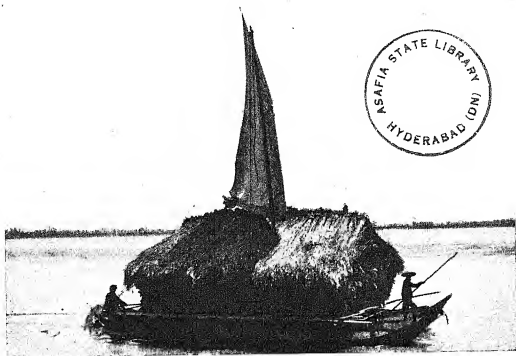
Only one trip was essentially different from the others, because through it I felt again the little qualm of fear which flickered every now and then across my mind all the time I was in China. I went down to Hsuechow, where we had an establishment of five foreigners, mostly Americans, buying tobacco leaf. Their arrival had cut into the profits of the local merchants, since our Company was now buying direct from the farmers. A few weeks before, our "No. 1 Chinese", a first-rate man, had been shot dead outside our compound where the soldiers were playing football. They went on playing football. Now the merchants had put a price on the head of our American manager. I was quick to catch the infection of nervousness from the little community. One night I woke one of them up, and he was out of bed, menacing me with a revolver, in a couple of seconds. We were all peevish and touchy, and disputes arose over cards in the evenings. The town was supposed to be unsafe at night, and I applied for a police escort when I had to pass through it to get my train. The escort did not turn up, and I was very jumpy during the long ricksha ride through the pitch-dark city, the oppressive silence only broken by the pad of my puller's feet on the sand, and occasionally a fierce challenge from an unseen sentry. A few weeks later the American manager was killed, shot in the back, and our leaf-buyers were withdrawn.

All this time I was grappling with the first elements of the Chinese language. It is a cruel language at first. I had a

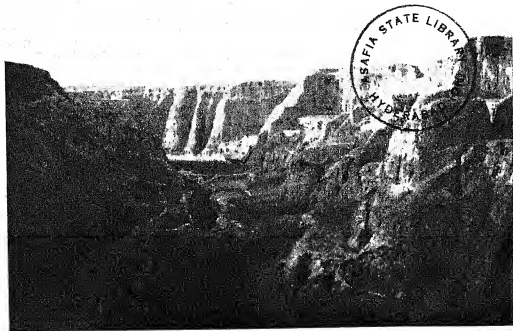
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teacher, a young railway clerk, who used to read sentences from a textbook over and over again and correct my stumbling attempts to repeat them. Round about Lesson Three, I think it was, I came nearest to cracking over the simple sentence "*Ch Tz Sh Di Sz Shng*", which, as anyone knows, means "This character is of the fourth Tone". I hissed and sizzled till I was purple in the face, and poor Dudley, who turned out to be a charming fellow, suffered a lot from my hysterical tantrums. I was like a *prima donna* who cannot reach top C. Finally I got past this Pons Asinorum after a fashion, and progressed smoothly to the stage of being able to make myself baldly understood and to check an interpreter, which was as far as I ever got.

It was planned that I should go to Sianfu and I was inoculated for typhus in preparation, but I suffered in vain, for I was recalled to Hankow. There were no tears in my eyes as I left Chengchow, but I cannot leave it without a farewell tribute to the wheelbarrows and their crews. Constructed basically like any other wheelbarrows, they carried enormous loads. The man behind them had a yoke over his shoulders, attached to the handles, to relieve the intolerable strain on his arms. He would move slowly forward with the stiff, tottering steps of a man under an excessive load, while in front, pulling on a rope, with beads of manly sweat pouring down his baby brow, naked as the day he was born and proud as Lucifer, stalked Eldest Son. The air was full of noise: the wheel shrieked on its axle (devils, it appears, are allergic to the noise, and I quite believe it); speedy road-hogs of rickshas, churning the sand at a fast walking pace, rattled by with cries of "Look out! look out! Out of the way!"; bullocks gasped and porters groaned; vendors cried their wares and fortune-tellers rattled their bones. Through it all, silent, because they had no breath for shouting and no time for complaining, the barrow-man and his son shouldered their cruel burden and went forward together.



TRAVELLING HAYSTACK, TUNGTING LAKE



LOESS FORMATION NEAR THE YELLOW RIVER

3

HUNAN

“H^o” means River and “Hu” means Lake: “Pei” means North and “Nan” means South. North of the Yellow river lies Hopei province, south of it my old stamping-ground of Honan. South of Honan comes Hupeh, which is north of the Lake (“Peh” is pronounced differently by now), and south of the Lake lies Hunan, which was to be my next station. I travelled down to Hankow only four months after I had left it, though it seemed much longer. I saw for the first time the high hills of the Honan-Hupeh border region, and assumed that they were great strongholds of bandits. I later learned that I was right except for one hill, the highest of them all, called Kikungshan, which was a health resort for missionaries on leave, or furlough as they always would call it. Hankow was as hot and fussed as ever, but my eye that looked at it was already a little changed. I noticed the porters, trotting along the Bund with their loads to the accompaniment of their monotonous doleful songs, more than the odd white sailor or business man taking his evening stroll. The Chinese cities seemed larger and more enveloping, the foreign area smaller, less assured, more welcoming. I spent a few days slaking my thirst, enlarging my acquaintance, playing tennis in the evening and getting out on the market in the heat of the day, and then departed by steamer for Changsha, the capital of Hunan province. It was not a long run — about a day — and not at all interesting. A few miles up the Yangtse we turned south into the mouth of the Siang river. We were now in the Lake, Tungting Lake, which is the landmark on which two great provinces get their “fixes”, but we should not have known it. As a lake it is disappointing. Most of the time it is an area of fens and marshes interlaced with waterways and susceptible of flood. One might call it an inland delta, and like other deltas, it is intensely fertile. The first signs of Changsha were of course the installations, A.P.C. on

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our right and Standard Oil on our left, lowering at each other across the water. A few miles more and the river divided into two streams, with a two-mile-long, narrow sliver of land, a glorified shoal, in the middle. This was the Island, where foreign business people had their homes. The city was on our left as we came up the easterly channel. The river was full of water for once, and even this half was above a quarter of a mile wide, and everything was lively and business-like. Hundreds of junks, beam to beam, nosed their way into the riverbanks, and as we hove-to opposite the Customs, the motor launches of the foreign companies rode out to meet us, with a brave fluttering of flags and pennants, and a jingling of telegraph bells. Over on the island I could see the tall flagpole of the British Consulate, and a series of British, American and German flags among the trees. It all seemed very attractive. I was taken up to my lodging, which I was to share with the Texas Oil representative, a pretty but dilapidated bungalow situated about half-way up the island and a good mile from our Company's house, where my "No. 1" lived, near the north end. The plumbing was rudimentary, but the garden was friendly, if unkempt, running right across the island. It was thus about forty yards wide. It appeared that I had arrived on a good day to meet the community, as there was to be a full meeting of the Club. We duly attended this concourse, and nearly all the eighteen full members were present. Half were British, the remainder German and American. About half had wives with them. I suppose I could write a good deal about the social life of Changsha, with its little jealousies and complexities, but this is not that sort of book. We were a harmonious crowd on the whole. Nearly all the married couples were in their first year or two of wedlock, and showed a commendable tendency to stay at home. This did not help the bachelors, who were thus left to their own devices and roamed about the island and the city sometimes alone, sometimes in packs. Saturday night was the big weekly "do" at the Club, and everybody used to turn up to dance to the gramophone and eat buffet supper and — in my case — drink into the small hours. I used to enjoy the weekly Musical Evening at the British Consulate. I had revived my execrable violin-playing, and though nearly all the other performers, of course, were

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Germans, we had a lot of fun and sometimes some good music. Morning gin on any British gunboat that happened to be in was another genial function, as was Sunday lunch down at one of the installations. Most of the foreigners did not travel much, and the ladies kept themselves to the island : I believe they had Knitting Bees and Mah-jongg Mornings and other spectacular diversions to while away the long hours during which their efficient and numerous servants were apt to make them feel superfluous. The " young marrieds ", anyway, were happy in Changsha.

My job in Hunan was to be much the same, except that I should be expected to show a little more initiative and occasionally hold the fort when my boss took a trip. I was not long in finding the Hunanese very different from the Honanese. In Honan, and indeed all North China, there is a tradition of hospitality and tolerance. The Hunanese are notorious for their dislike of " foreigners ", whether from other provinces or from beyond the sea. Where the Honan dealers were apt to be simple and open, the Hunan dealers were, at their best, genial rogues. Hunan and the Lake are the richest rice-producing lands in the world, and given peace, the people can store enough to support them in the occasional drought years. Hunan is famous for the beauty and character of its women, a reputation which I can endorse. The sing-song girls at Hunanese parties were brighter, prettier and more numerous than in any other inland province. The thirty-odd million people of this happy region were exceedingly well-to-do. Their clothes were good and clean. There must be thirty big towns with streets paved with flagstones, and numerous houses of stone. It was amazing what one could buy in the assorted-goods shops in these inland ports. Thermos flasks and electric torches, Chinese made, excellent and very cheap, were among the commonest of goods. I bought silk underwear and could have bought silk stockings, I had shoes made to measure and even bought myself a pair of goloshes, though there is not a Chinese alive who takes anything approaching my size. Only the more graceful produce of China, silver and ivory and jade, was not to be found in Hunan. Their embroidery was famous but I found it disappointing. Characteristically, the workmanship was meticulous and flawless, but the designs were stereo-

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typed and dull. There was something a little English about these Hunanese. Hard people, hard-working, respectable, very appreciative of good workmanship, builders of well-found junks and the best roads in the Far East, eaters of good plain food, intolerant of foreign nonsenses, not impressed by airs and graces, a nation of farmers, shopkeepers, watermen and tradesmen, each with his own pride and dignity. They were the only people in China who would not touch the cheaper cigarettes which we poured forth in Hankow, Canton and Shanghai. Nothing but the best was good enough for Hunan.

Communications were excellent. Steamers came up to Changsha through the summer from Hankow and Shanghai, shallow-draught lighters in the winter, and junks in their thousands all the year round. The railway from Hankow to Changsha was already complete, and the difficult stretch right down to Canton, completing the railway system from the ports of the British Channel to Hongkong, was finished while I was still there. The roads had only what the Americans call a "dirt" surface, but the foundations were of good stone and the soil was gravelly, and I have travelled fifty miles on them in an hour in pouring rain. South to the Kwangtung border, south-west to Kwangsi, and west to Kweichow the river routes were duplicated by these roads. So my travelling was extensive and seldom arduous.

My visits to the outlying towns followed the usual pattern which I had learned in Honan. The towns differed only in size. Every town in Hunan is on the bank of a river; if the bank is shallow enough there are stone streets parallel with the waterfront — nearly always there is at least one such — and at the steeper points wooden houses support themselves on bamboo stilts. A surprisingly large number have electric lighting plants, and use them profusely. There are the same thronging junks and sampans, the same hubbub of business in the streets. The dinner parties varied only in their richness, their abandon (great drinkers, the Hunanese) and the number and attractions of the girls. Just as fish is often scarce by the sea, the places most famous for beautiful women were often disappointing, the best products no doubt being reserved for export! but nobody in Hunan need lack attractive feminine company. There was a smell, too, about Hunan streets which I cannot describe,

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compounded of the smoke of water-pipes, and joss-sticks, and dung, and above all, of humanity : a warm, insidious, subtly exciting smell, like the smell of horses, or ploughed fields after a shower of rain : a raw, fertile smell, the smell of life in concentration.

Not content with showering Hunan with abundant grain, numerous forests of wood-oil trees and splendid rivers by which to carry these products away, the Creator has added fruitful coal mines, some gold in the Far West, and down to the south, only a few miles from the capital, deposits of antimony with, I believe, capacity to produce 80 per cent of the world's total supply. These antimony mines were the private property of the villages round about. Each miner would go to work when he felt like it, dig as much antimony as he felt inclined, and sell it to a purchasing society at a standard price. A few years before I arrived foreigners, mostly Germans, used to buy the antimony regulus from the society, paying a fair price, and ship it down to Shanghai. It was a profitable trade, and champagne flowed freely in the Changsha Club, but recently the Central Government had declared a monopoly, cutting out the foreigners. The monopolists saw their chance. The price at the mines went down, the price at Shanghai went up ; but few people get the better of the Hunanese, and before I left the miners were on strike, leaving the greedy officials and a re-arming world to pay up or do without.

The country-side is less spacious but more restful than in Honan. It was a relief to see hills after so many weeks of interminable plain. On the western bank of the river is a minor holy mountain called Yo Lo Shan with Hunan University at its foot. It stood just opposite my bungalow, and I was not in Changsha long before I jumped into a ferry-boat and fifteen minutes later was striding towards the foothills. The hill is, I suppose, less than a thousand feet high, but rising steeply almost from the water's edge as it does, it acquires a presence which its dimensions do not warrant. At the top is a temple, with wispy monks and terrifying masks of gods, and the periodic crash of a gong which is one of the inescapable noises of China. Dotted about are unattractive tombs commemorating local potentates. Over on the west side I found old fortifications : you cannot go far in China without coming upon old fortifica-

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tions and new graves. There are many fine trees on the hill, and at one end there runs a little English brook, set about with grass and flowers, which I regarded as my own private property. Many times I wandered alone among the trees, and listened to the birds and the bursting friction of the cicadas, and rejoiced that for once I was actually out of sight and sound of all the human race. Such a condition is amazingly rare in China. Wherever you go there is always a farmer in sight, or a small boy tending a water-buffalo. Even here my peace did not last long. After I had sat still for a time the faint hum of human activity from the city a mile away would swell to a veritable clamour till it finally drowned the bird noises, as I had noticed the rumble of Lausanne swell in my ear as I lay in a boat far out on Lake Leman; or perhaps a shrill party of school children would come up to plunder the azaleas which swept through the woods like a forest fire in the autumn. So I would collect my Texas friend's undisciplined dogs and stumble down the slopes, back across the evening river to the island, to spend the rest of the day in civilisation — playing bridge or billiards, or scratching catgut at the Consulate, or perhaps, if the dealers were feeling hospitable, in sporting with Amaryllis or the tangles of Neaera's hair. Only it would not be Neaera, but Green Jade, or Glorious Moon, or White Cloud, or Silver Peach. And one was not very much inclined to trifle with their elaborate, oleaginous coiffures.

I went southwards in our station waggon, past Heng Shan, which is one of the important Holy Mountains, to which thousands of pilgrims travel every year, past Hengchowfu, one of the biggest cities, and southwards again. A subtle difference made itself felt as we neared the 200th milestone from Changsha. The country was just as pretty, in fact more so. The hills were not so high, but the cultivation was less intense. As the river grew smaller towards its source, the towns became more picturesque and less business-like. This is one of the most easy-going regions I have known in China. The business men we interviewed were dim, not to say stupid, and sales were low. I doubled back on my tracks to the fork in the river and followed up the other branch to the south-west, towards Kwangsi province. There I found the same thing — far less people, though there did not seem to be anything wrong with

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the soil, smaller towns, dullness, apathy. There is a watershed on this border so gentle as to be imperceptible to the traveller. On the north side the Siang river runs down through Hunan and the lake to the Yangtse. On the south side the Kwei river passes the entrancing rapids I was to see later, and proceeds stormily down to the West river and Canton. Where these two streams have their modest origin, the Chinese have cut a little canal joining them, so that a sampan or a small junk may travel uninterrupted from north to south. Thus the Aryan vigour of Central China fades and gives place to the Mediterranean passion of the South. The two peoples, utterly different as they are, live side by side — yet apart, and will not mingle ; only those diggers on the Hunan-Kwangsi border have grafted that one little vein through which blood flows from one to the other, so that they can never be quite separate.

Back in Changsha again, with a good autumn nip in the air and everybody active and interested. These were stirring times, and though I am writing without notes and my chronology is vague, I will record the salient features of historical significance in 1936. In the beginning of the year Leith-Ross hitched the Chinese dollar to the English pound : the Japanese would have preferred a different arrangement. In the spring the Japanese plan to cripple the North China authorities, by gangsterism directed mainly against the Customs Control, was costing the Central Government millions of dollars each month in loss of revenue. In the summer the troops of Kwangsi marched north under their mighty generals, Pai and Li, to defy Chiang Kai-shek. The Central troops moved south, and civil war was expected, fed perhaps by Japanese gold. Not a shot was fired, agreement was reached on all points and the troops went home. Henceforth China's most independent province became the strongest bastion of her defence, and Pai and Li stood on either side of the Generalissimo to guard the bridge. In the middle of winter came the awful news that Chiang had been kidnapped by the Communists. All China was moved as all China was never moved since the great days of the Emperors,—stricken suddenly, beyond expectation, like the people of England at the death of King George V. When Madame Chiang flew to the side of her husband all China wept. When Chiang was released there was a sigh of relief

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and a blast of firecrackers that laid a cloud of sound over the whole Far East. The Young Marshal came to Nanking as a suppliant, and was publicly forgiven the treason to which his love of China had driven him. It is impossible to avoid a feeling that these two episodes were mere play-acting, yet they were very real and very dangerous at the time. There was bloodshed at Sianfu ; it was pure luck that Chiang did not get shot in the first confusion of the *coup*. That Chiang emerged from both dangers with his nerve unshaken and his dignity unimpaired marked him as a really great man, and of course his popularity was enormously increased. But that day started a struggle. The policy agreed on at Sianfu was — no more concessions to the Japanese. No more troops would be needed, henceforth, to hold the Communists in check : no more to hold down the South. China was united as never before, and in a few years nothing would be able to stop her. The historian Thucydides, writing of the war of 431 B.C., said, " The fact was that the Athenians were growing stronger, and the Spartans were forced into war by fear ". The Japanese must fight soon or not at all.

I went on the road again, this time to the west. Easy, undulating country as far as Changteh, 110 miles, but there was one-way traffic over much of the next 140 miles, as the road coiled in innumerable hairpin bends over a mountain range and down to Yuanling. This is a very lovely town. The river is clear blue, the soil is red and the high green banks are dotted with temples and pagodas. The hills we passed were unusually well wooded, and it was a happy trip in the bright mild autumn air which smelled like spring. Back at Changteh, the second city of Hunan and gateway to the west of the province, I stayed, as on all my subsequent visits, with the missionaries. There are in peace-time many thousands of missionaries in China, of all denominations from the Seventh Day Adventists to the Church of Rome. I sometimes admired, but nearly always pitied them. They seemed to miss all the fun of China, the virility, the gusto, the extravagance and the humour — all, that is, except the Catholics. The doctors, like the American doctor at Changteh, I admired especially. Theirs was a heart-breaking task, as few cases were brought to them until they were already beyond aid, and money and



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equipment were always short. Somehow, by their honesty and perseverance and obvious goodwill, these admirable people begged or borrowed, from a race little given to indiscriminate charity, and mostly from the Unfaithful, the wherewithal to carry on their thankless task. They would say that the Lord had provided. Back in Changsha there was a great American institution called "Yale-in-China", an establishment financed by the famous University and comprising a church, a big hospital and a complete educational system. But Dr. Tootell, in Changteh, had not the same backing.

From here I struck off overland for a couple of the lake cities. I was travelling by chair, not the glorified telephone-box in which the *élite* of the Regency did their afternoon calls, but a crude contraption of bamboo. I felt so ashamed of myself, and sorry for my three bearers, that I walked almost the whole way, which may have been undignified and foreign-devilish but at least kept me warm. This was fen country, East Anglian: we travelled all day with a river on one side and marshes, in which only lotus grew, on the other. I saw many marsh birds, slow-flying gentle creatures with colourful beaks. It was getting cold and it was very quiet with all that water about, and I was enjoying myself, although at Ansiang I was entertained to dinner on a freezing night in the open air. The Chinese had fur inside their long gowns and were perfectly happy, but though I sat over a charcoal brazier, it was not till I had achieved several Gambeis that I began to thaw. I arrived home in rude health, feeling very pleased with China. I was beginning to understand these genial, hospitable people, I thought. I liked them, and as long as I did the right thing by them, they would not let me down. I was ripe for a few surprises.

One day a telegram came from a town called Tsingshih, reporting that in a fire all our stocks, amounting to nearly 200 big cases of cigarettes, had been destroyed. I proceeded hot-foot to the scene, two hundred miles by car and, owing to a broken bridge, bus. I was received by our dealer, an independent merchant and one of the wealthiest men in town, and royally entertained. Tsingshih is, I believe, the gayest provincial town in the world. The smart thing there is to give dinner parties at midnight, so after a good supper I went to

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bed and was called at 11.30 for the big "do". It was a big party, yet there were at least two girls to every guest — I have never seen so many girls. They were all apparently devoted to the dealer, who was a charming fellow, and we had a terrible night.

I had of course inspected the books, and found them in order, on my arrival the night before. I was quite appalled when I went to view the damage. Three whole streets had been destroyed, and in the middle a few blackened tin linings, still hot to the touch, marked the pyre of our godown. Even so, being of a cautious turn of mind, I interviewed the president of the local Chamber of Commerce, who gave me a written statement to the effect that no cigarettes had been saved. I went back to base and made my report, and the insurance company paid, and the incident was apparently closed ; only my boss, a wily bird from the southern states of America, bred to study the tortuous minds of negroes and with seventeen years of China behind him, looked at me oddly and said nothing. Time passed, and the chief of our Chinese office staff, a likeable fellow of great intelligence, who wore foreign dress and whom I had always frankly regarded as my superior — as a junior officer may feel of a sergeant-major — came back from a trip to the backward province of Kweichow, where he had been prospecting for business on behalf of the restless, never-satisfied Company. Still nothing happened, yet the Tsingshih fire case files were not closed, compensation for the personal losses of our staff, which I had recommended, was never paid. Finally, one bitter day just before Christmas, the whole thing, as the boss put it, "broke". There was a dispute over the division of the spoil, and somebody talked. Through the maelstrom of mud that was stirred up it transpired that the dealer, with the connivance of the young godown keeper, had drawn and sold twenty cases before the fire, without the entry being shown in our books ; that a further five cases had been rescued and sold privily ; that Tsiang, our "sergeant-major", had so abused his position that almost the whole staff was paying him a percentage of their salaries, and most of the dealers were either doing the same or were actually his servants — even the local Changsha dealers were in his pocket ; that the delightful magnate who had entertained me so well at Tsingshih was a

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man of straw, a puppet working on Tsiang's ill-gotten capital. I was sent to Tsingshih to be prepared to "sack" the dealer on telegraphic advice from the boss. There I spent a hideous five days, refusing all invitations, miserably doing nothing, woken up by the nocturnal roystering in the hotel every night, keeping my own counsel. My presence in the town was of course the source of endless speculation ; the dealer called repeatedly, and my evasions kept him worried ; my interdict on sales caused the market to run dry of cigarettes, and the trade was loud in its protests ; but still I must wait, until on Christmas Eve the telegram arrived. To break a man whose hospitality you have enjoyed is no pleasant task, and I was as gentle as possible, permitting it to be reported that he had resigned, and he took the blow gracefully. I went back on Christmas Day with a heavy heart. It is unpleasant to feel a fool. It is horrible to be betrayed. For a time I hated the Chinese, though one could eventually see the matter through their eyes. It was part of what had been China's tragedy for centuries : office was regarded, not as an opportunity to serve, but as a source of personal aggrandisement. The men with the power had had their run, finally being caught. We had been selling our cigarettes all this time, and had been repaid in full for what was, after all, the insurance company's loss. Why should anyone bear malice ? But I never felt the same about the Chinese again. I had been so anxious, so pathetically anxious, as it now seems, to make friends among them, and it had all ended in this sordid swindle.

The next episode was equally sordid, though less subtly painful. I was travelling again, by motor-boat this time, which sounds more attractive than it was. It was low water, and I seldom saw anything beyond the river-banks. I found some diversion in the life on the river itself — watching a haystack weighing down a sampan which had only a couple of inches to spare, or one of the mighty rafts, with families or even villages living on them, in which timber is moved from the up-country forests to the sea ; but it rained almost every day in January and February and I was feeling ill. One day I stopped at Siangyin, a transshipping point where, at low water, hundreds of coolies carried goods from one lighter, past the shoals, to another. They told me — afterwards — it was a notoriously

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anti-foreign area. . . . I was entertained to dinner by a rather young dealer, and afterwards he "called" a certain actress, of local reputation, who was playing at the theatre. An actress in China is a glorified sing-song girl, and she came and entertained us all, especially some comparatively wealthy Chinese associates of the Company I had with me. We retired around midnight, and in the small hours I awoke from a surfeited sleep to hear a tremendous clamour without, people shouting and calling out and banging on the hotel door, and to see my young interpreter bending over me.

"What is that noise?"

"It is the bad men of the town, sir."

"What do they want?"

"They want you, sir."

"What the hell for?"

"Oh, sir, they say you raped the actress!"

Horror suddenly surged inside me, and the sweat began to flow. I first, lest my memory might be playing me tricks, confirmed that I had not touched the woman. The hotel-keeper had not yet opened the door. I told the interpreter to join forces with the other Chinese who were in the next room, and myself decamped through the window. This is not an heroic story, but I have always been nervous of crowds, and I hope that nobody who has not heard the clamour of several score of muscular, impassioned coolies, any of whom would cheerfully have raped his grandmother for 7½d., yelling for his blood at 2 A.M., will be in a hurry to cast a stone. As I was blundering around the back premises I luckily — this is the only redeeming feature of a squalid episode — encountered the faithful crew of the motor-boat, who had heard the din a mile off and come to my rescue, and I did not stop moving till I had reached the comparative security of the *M/L Kingfisher*. I armed myself with a mighty spanner and awaited the pursuit. There was none. I took the biggest whisky I have ever seen swallowed, and, still carrying my spanner, set out through the black streets, empty of people but full of imagined hostile eyes, and, followed by the crew (a man and a boy), stumbled my way back to the fray, to rescue, as I hoped, my beleaguered comrades. I had only to follow my ears. The fracas had adjourned to the police station, where the local bigwigs, my

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friends, and a choice selection of the rough element were all screaming vituperations at one another. My side, in a minority but with the conviction of rectitude, was putting up a good show but was slowly but surely being shouted down. A Chinese crowd, perhaps any mob, may gradually work itself up to the pitch where deeds take the place of words, but once the crisis is past and the matter is one of argument again, the danger is past. I entered violently, made for the man who appeared to be in authority, and began my denunciation. I used few Chinese words, and those mostly obscene. Huge, unkempt, wild-eyed and not yet hoarse, I fairly irrupted into the conference, cursing and swearing, shouting at the top of my voice. The tide of battle turned. Between spasms of abuse which had served me well as a coach of oarsmen on the Cam, I bandied the names of Marshal Chiang and the King of England in Chinese: as soon as I had a hearing, I bade my allies join in with protests at this international outrage, this horrible jettison of "face". The magistrates, caught between two fires, became worried, and finally papers were signed by both sides to the effect that a misunderstanding had occurred but had been settled amicably. Finally we made a more or less dignified retreat. I never found out just what had happened, whether the actress had maligned us to cover her late return, or some agitator had been at work: whether they wanted my money or my life. It was only when I got back to Changsha to face a highly displeased boss that I saw an item in the local press to the effect that a huge foreigner, after raping an actress at Siangyin, had fought his way out with a revolver.

Meanwhile history was moving on. On Chiang Kai-shek's birthday the citizens of the Chinese Republic subscribed, city by city and province by province, to buy him an air force. I believe over fifty up-to-date war planes were purchased from America. Hunan's contribution was three fighters, and the whole city went out to see the handing-over ceremony and christening. The three aircraft were named "Changsha", "Opium Suppression No. 1" and "Opium Suppression No. 2". The population cheered and clapped loudly at this felicitous choice. Then the British Ambassador, making his Grand Tour and incidentally paying a compliment to the new Hankow-Canton railway, arrived from Hankow. This was an

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"occasion", and its beginning was marked by a happy coincidence. It chanced that both Sir Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen with his staff, and Mei Lan Fang, far the greatest actor in China, arrived by the same train. All the high civil officials, many of them in uniform and supported by a band, were there to meet the British Ambassador. A large section of the more artistic community were there with a rival band to acclaim the actor. Hundreds of presumably impartial citizens thronged the platform cheering the double feature enthusiastically as the train came in. Sir Hughe, in his speech later in the morning, said he was "overcome" by the warmth of his reception at Changsha, while Mei Lan Fang, who could not remember being met by quite so many high officials in his long and distinguished career, was walking on air.

I mentioned earlier that I had bought goloshes, the first I had since childhood, and very necessary they now were. As the rain poured steadily down, the perverse river fell and fell exposing the long sands which give Changsha its name. Long Muds would be more appropriate. My journey to the Club, instead of a short ride in a motor sampan, became a soggy pilgrimage through the little villages and gardens that filled every corner of the island not appropriated by the foreigners. Short trips I made were a misery. Cigarette hawkers scurried for shelter. But the business of the province went on — the Hunanese were not to be put off by a bit of rain, and when at last the sun broke through and spring began to make itself felt, my spirits rose. Whatever you feel about individuals, you cannot dislike the Chinese, even the Hunanese, for long. As the boss said, "I can't help it, I like the little bastards". Their relentless industry and unfailing sense of humour cannot be resisted indefinitely, and as fertility rose again like an exhalation from the steaming earth, I began to feel better about China. Perhaps my standards had been wrong; anyway I was ready to have another try. It was just as well that in April the Company decided to transfer me to South China; it was with a heavy sense of failure that I retraced my steps down the now hostile-seeming Siang river, down the dirty Yangtse to drunken Shanghai, then aboard a friendly, family P. & O. steamer and out of it all suddenly next morning into the clean fresh blueness of the open sea.

4

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FROM the moment I looked out of my porthole one May dawn and saw the islands that surround Hongkong sliding past, my life for three days was one long gasp of delight. The muddy waters of China were forgotten : the green islands that rose steeply out of the brilliant blue might have been the Western Highlands in June — and indeed we were in British waters now. I think all Englishmen carry a private flag in the back of their minds. Most of the time it is very small, no bigger than a postage stamp. Sometimes it droops sadly in a forgotten corner. Usually as the Englishman gets further from home his flag perks up little by little, and now as I sailed in a British ship through the ravishing approaches and into the great blue harbour, and looked up to the Peak rising sheer out of the sea, my private Union Jack expanded at least to postcard size, and stood out flat and steady in the breeze of my enthusiasm. When we docked I was met by another of our young men, who told me that while waiting on the quay he had been conversing with a Chinese girl he knew. For this he had been reprimanded by an elderly Englishwoman, who said, "I have been here for thirty-five years, and thank God I have never had anything to do with the Chinese !" My flag fluttered doubtfully for an instant, but the scene was too strong for doubt, and soon my enthusiasm was blowing as hard as ever.

After a breakfast of coffee and kippers at the Hongkong Hotel, I paid my respects at the office, and went off to explore the town. The Coronation was drawing near, and the mighty tower of the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank, whose main hall seemed as big as Paddington Station, was topped by an enormous gilt crown, a masterpiece of imperial vulgarity. As a shopping centre Hongkong does not compare with Shanghai : the few completely foreign streets have indeed their share of good shops, and two good hotels, but pride of place goes rightly to the banks and the big austere offices of the worldwide

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shipping companies. The Government lives up on the Peak, aloof from the turmoil of trade, and there, too, the Upper Ten of the business community have their residences. I was taken to Repulse Bay, to drink at the hotel, and bathe in surroundings that put the French Riviera to shame. On the way back we stopped to look at the view from the pass high up on the Peak — that fairest of all views. In the distance, the islands ; below, the clean orderly buildings of the city ; in between, the vast blue harbour with all the shipping in the world at anchor and the brown-sailed junks fluttering between them like butterflies from flower to flower. If this is the British Empire, I thought, it is not so funny as a lot of people in England seem to think.

Later, when the red, white and blue of my mental flag had ceased to tint my vision, I thought that Hongkong was a top-heavy community. Like the Hongkong Bank, the crown was too big for the body. Take away the Government and the white traders, their employees and servants and grandiose buildings, and there would not be many people left to govern. I do not approve of more than a small percentage of the citizens of any state being concerned directly with governing it. There seemed to me to be practically no agriculture at all on the Island — indeed, that is the only reason we possess it — and not a great deal in the Leased Territories of the mainland. The answer is that Hongkong is there to be an outpost of Britain, and to its population and territories must be added the million square miles of the Pacific and Indian Oceans, all dotted with ships carrying men and treasure of whose safe passage the long arm of the British Navy was the only guarantee. When the brave English traders first came to China they were not hospitably received. In the South for a time they were not allowed on the mainland at all. As a sop, as a concession, they were thrown the rock of Hongkong and a mud-flat just off the mainland of Canton. Of this rock the foreign devils cut the jewel that it is, and on that mud built the compact little island suburb of Shameen, and there for decades they went about their business and thrived. Through these and similar gateways seeped the foreign ideas that overthrew the Emperors and eventually built up China nearly — so nearly — to the status of a first-class modern power.

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Immediately on entering South China I began to see history around me, and realised how used I had been to seeing historical landmarks in England, and how I had unconsciously missed them in Central China. There is no history in Honan. The bullock-carts and wheelbarrows, the methods of agriculture and trade had not changed in God knows how many thousand years : since the first discovery of metal, the taming of beasts, the invention of the wheel. Foreign steamers had intruded, factories had been built, but intrusive and foreign they remained, having no roots in China, and one felt always that if China decided to expel the foreigners, their inventions would go with them and no trace would remain. In South China there was a *rapprochement* : the Chinese of the Coast, seafarers themselves, had adopted foreign notions and made them their own, meanwhile emigrating in their millions and exploiting the foreign enterprise on foreign soil. Perhaps this was the clue — the dynamic Chinese had not sat back and allowed the new notions to be foisted on them. They had gone forth and discovered them for themselves and brought back their fancy.

The South China junk is a gallant buccaneering vessel compared with the domesticated, lumbering craft of the rivers. The russet-ribbed sails, with all the tints of autumn leaves, are cut at a rakish angle, and often there is a great eye painted on the bows and rusty foreign cannon peering from the stern. The great bulk of passenger traffic in the waters of the Delta is carried by tows. These astonishing craft resemble as much as anything the after-half of the flagship of the Duke of Medina Sidonia. The bows are low and flat, rearing up suddenly to an immense poop, with tier upon tier of cabin windows that look like gun-ports, with workmanship as elegant as the scroll of a violin, the whole surmounted by countless flags and banners and, for the night, hung like a Christmas tree with electric lights. These mighty water-waggons, towed on a long rope by a wholly foreign steam launch, give the acme of comfort in travel, being utterly free of vibration. They could never be used without the foreign launches ; they are I suppose of Portuguese inspiration, yet utterly Chinese in execution, with all the ingenuity and ostentation that that people loves to express. The architecture of Canton again showed foreign influence, without foreign

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intervention. The streets were wide, and along nearly every pavement one could walk in the shade, as the upper stories were built out and supported on pillars. I have seen the same sort of thing in Turin, yet neither foreign capital nor foreign architect built the brick and stucco streets of Canton. In the shops it was the same — goods might be in styles originally foreign, but were now manufactured by Chinese for Chinese. In North China our dealers and other prosperous Chinese might wear foreign dress and especially foreign hats as an affectation of modernity, but thousands of Cantonese wore foreign dress as a matter of course, and made their own cloth as well as cut it, so that on seeing them you no longer thought "Chinese in foreign dress", but "Cantonese business men or officials". They even produced their own highly individual version of the Trilby hat, made of black and white straw.

But I am jumping ahead. From Hongkong to Canton is a night's journey by steamer — not a dull grey or brown steamer like those which ply on the Yangtse, but gleaming white, spick and span, a blaze of electricity at night. I was travelling with Lin, our American-educated "No. 1 Chinese" at Canton, who took me to our flat on Shameen. Shameen is a trim little lozenge-shaped island separated from the mainland by a dirty narrow creek, and reached by the English and French bridges. It is nine-tenths of a mile long, and at its widest point little more than two hundred yards wide. It is impossible not, sooner or later, to liken Shameen to a ship, and it was one of our standing jokes to wait for new arrivals to bring out this original simile, and pretend we had never thought of it before. It was split longitudinally by a wide street with a grass strip up the centre and flame-of-the-forest trees on either side. There were the usual two stately British banks, an American, a French and a German bank, numerous handsome consulates, and various offices, blocks of flats, and houses large and small. One third, at the eastern end, was the French Concession, the remainder the British Concession. No cars were allowed, and the annual licence fee was ten dollars for one dog and two hundred dollars for two, so the canine population was kept in check. A pleasant, well-treed Bund ran right round the island, an ideal evening promenade deck, and altogether it was quite a luxurious little ship.

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My boss, who received me in his lovely flat overlooking the Pearl river to the south, was a very sick man, tended by his wife and daughter, and I withdrew to my own domain at the back of the building. The breeze was not so good, but I was comfortable enough with a big sitting-room and a dining-room, several bedrooms and bathrooms, a verandah and beautiful parquet floors which were the pride and joy of the servants. I spent the first few days in looking round me and having injections for amoebic dysentery, and then there were the Coronation celebrations — a dance at the Club, reception at the Consulate, naval firework display, and finally a "ball" on three gunboats moored side by side. I knew hardly anybody, and the boss's family, being quarantined, could do nothing for me, so I enjoyed it all less than I might have done, and was not sorry immediately afterwards to plunge into an orgy of travelling.

A recurring job for our young men, to which I have not referred before, was attending giant bonfires. Every time a packet of our cigarettes became damaged on a wayside hawker's stand, he handed it back to his dealer and received a new packet in exchange. When these damaged goods got back to us, together with odd cases that had fallen into rivers or been overtaken by floods, we had to burn them in the presence of tax officials (and police to prevent the spectators snatching) in order to get refund of tax. Moreover, in Canton, for every ten empty packets of certain brands, we were giving away a full one, and these empty packets, being in a sense currency, had also to be rigorously checked and destroyed. So the morning after the last party, feeling far from well, I embarked at dawn on the ugliest motor cargo launch in existence, having been badly shaken, as I climbed on board, to observe that the sailor who handed me up had six toes on both feet. It was not one of my best trips. The boat was uncomfortable and vibrated violently and rolled like a sick cow at the slightest change of course. The toilet arrangement of two boards hung by wires over the stern was precarious and particularly embarrassing as my insides had imperfectly recovered (owing perhaps in part to Coronation celebrations). Nor was it much fun standing all day in the roasting sun, counting endless bundles of empty packets and consigning them to the flames. Night I spent on

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deck off Shekki city, in a channel crowded with river craft large and small, and was woken up for the first of many, many times by the passing of the great tows. The launch puffed and the tow glided with only a soft swirling noise, and as they neared the wharf the tug and the tow talked to one another, the former with blasts on her siren, the latter with the jangling of a great bell. In the morning I walked round Shekki, typical of countless other South China towns. The strongest impression I got was of emptiness. The streets were wide and modern, the houses of stone or cement and the pavements shaded, but where, oh where was the hum and bustle of the cities of the plain? Instead of elbowing my way through the throng, I wandered self-consciously down the middle of the road, like a lonely couple dancing on a deserted floor. It was a relief to get back to the creek, where all was life and movement again. There is no repose on the waters of the Delta.

The months that followed were the most vivid of my life, and I can never hope to see another period like it for variety and colour. For the first time, I congratulated myself on deserting the secure dull prospect of professional life in England for the inscrutable East. When I returned from my restless wanderings I threw myself into the hectic chaos of Shameen life, and when that threatened to be too much for me I dashed off again with renewed zest into the interior. Outside Canton, we divided Kwangtung province into four areas, the Delta being one, and the three great rivers, conveniently named the West, North and East rivers, providing labels for the other three. I "did" the Delta first. I went by a rickety old train to Fatshan and Taishan, both fat, prosperous suburban cities, almost bursting with their wealth of rice and raw silk from the incredibly fertile soil — consisting as it did of the top-dressing washed down through the years from all South China. Even in this wealth I still found emptiness. Then on to Samshui, or "three waters", the gateway to the West river, where I had splendid political arguments with the Italian Commissioner of Customs and his ravishing Russian wife, and where one day, waiting for a steamer, I had my first meal of rice birds, poor little tiny things which one ate at one mouthful, bones, beak and all. Female labour is much used in South China, not only in the fields, as in the North, but for rowing and carrying as

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well, and arriving at Samshui station I had literally to fight my way through the horde of portresses who fought bitterly for my baggage. Women also ruled all the sampans which carried the passengers out to the steamers, and I thought that here at least was sexual equality, if indeed the men could as much as hold their own. But alas, I found that the portresses were the slaves of harsh masters who took three-quarters of their earnings, and men, too, owned and exploited the small jetties by which alone the passengers could go dry-shod to the boats. The women were not endowed by Nature to inspire one with chivalry, but I hated the men of Samshui, mean, disagreeable, cross-eyed creatures that they all seemed to be, levying their outrageous toll on their women folk, and I was annoyed with the women for submitting.

When our house-boat came out of dry dock I made many journeys to the Delta towns. I went to the famous port of Kongmoon, where all the town turned out to watch our *laodah* (steersman) swing his boat round, like the great waterman that he was, in the rushing waters of a creek that allowed him only a few feet of clearance between the junks moored along both banks. Kongmoon heads an area noted for emigration, and great wealth pours in every year in remittances from Chinese in foreign lands. There is even a railway (on which, of course, I travelled) with an early Victorian locomotive and one train, all imported by returned wanderers to remind them of the great world outside. Twenty other cities I visited, all with an air of waning prosperity, due to the genius of the Cantonese for being somewhere else, preferably in a boat, rather than to any real decline. The countless rivers and creeks flowed through an ocean of pale-green rice fields; banana trees on the banks reminded me that I was really in the tropics at last; the tows swung majestically by, and the rakish junks with their primeval cannon looked out of the corners of their painted eyes for lurking pirates; and as I putt-putted homewards, with my gramophone hurling forth the challenge of Kreisler and Beethoven to the Orient, the enormous water-colour sunsets made me glad to be alive.

I explored the East river, starting by the Canton-Kowloon railway to Sheklung. Here I crossed the river dizzily on a narrow steel pathway placed between the girders of the railway

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bridge, then went on by bus to Waichow. There is a lake at Waichow, and a "modern" hotel on its banks, where the dealer gave us a dinner on the roof and I watched the sunset as the people of the town disported themselves on the water, and was nearly eaten to death by mosquitoes from the ornamental lake. There are hills around Waichow, and the land is not so fertile, and I found the people dull and stupid like the Southerners of Hunan. I travelled further east to Hoyuen, then back to Waichow and swept round through Tamshui to the railway again near the border of the British territory, and so home by train. I travelled a lot by bus at this time and loathed every minute of it. To start with, the buses were built to Cantonese dimensions, and I could neither stand nor sit down in comfort. They were invariably overcrowded. The tired American engines, bred to the pure fumes of gasoline, struggled manfully to digest the noxious charcoal gases cooked for them in a cracked, hissing generator hung on the stern, but they often gave up in despair. The roads were rough and the company was varied: I once travelled in a small bus with two pigs, ten chickens and a large basket of live crabs, besides what seemed like a hundred hot but genial Chinese. Usually someone was sick. . . . Later, with the war on, I toured this district in the luxury of the Company car, and broke out to the coast at the tiny fishing village of O-tau. There is always something a little exciting about emerging to the sea; I know a little what Xenophon felt, and stout Cortés. And there is something international, or un-national, about a fishing village with its rough seaworthy boats, crude cottages and nets drying in the sun.

Back to Canton for a dose of society and a draught of vintage at the Club. My boss went away on sick leave with his family, but the office could look after itself, and the North river was calling. I went up by train, and met a friendly German who was travelling for Bayer. (I saw him in a lift in Shanghai in 1940, very happy that the British had released his wife and children from internment in Hongkong and delivered them safely on his doorstep.) The country as I saw it from the train was magnificently green, and after Shiukwan it became seriously mountainous, so that the brave new railway wound precariously up the river-banks. At Pingshek, fourteen hours

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by train from Canton, I was only a few miles from Hunan. Even here the river, though rapid, was big enough to carry substantial sampans, and after I had looked at the poor little town, little more than a staging post for the old trade which would in future go by rail, I got into a small boat and was whirled down the rapids to Lokcheong almost as fast as the engine had dragged me up. From here another bus journey to the east, then down to Shiukwan again, and home in an evil-smelling third-class carriage that was cursed with a "convenience" that did not work. All these towns were the same; gorgeous settings they had among the green hills, good houses and fair streets with nobody on them. Only the river was alive. I had an amusing encounter on this trip with two awful tramps in the third class, whom I took at first to be White Russians. I saw them in trouble with the police at Pingshek, and was not particularly surprised. When we came back together I found one was an old Etonian taking a holiday after running the Coronation celebrations in Hongkong, the other, his Parisian brother-in-law, an artist, whom I was to meet again. They had intended to shoot the rapids from Pingshek, but the British Government official had not brought his passport, and the police, suspicious of their disreputable appearance, made them sit on the station for eight hours and take the next train back. On another North river excursion I again came down the river by sampan and spent a night at a monastery an hour's hard climb up the valley-side. There I was in timeless China again, the gentle, elegant China of pictures. Pigeons flew about with little whistles tied to their breasts, piping delicately through the air. The monks were old and kind (this was an asylum for the old and poor) and fed me — inadequately — on dried mushrooms. They wouldn't let me walk in the hills for fear of the tigers which, they said, abounded. I had a very cold bath in a mountain stream, and felt pleasantly rested, but, as always in China, life meant more to me than scenery and I was glad to be back in Canton.

The gentlemen of Shameen have traditionally a name for gallantry, the ladies for graciousness. Be that as it may, life was certainly hectic, gay and sometimes complicated — as one can imagine it on a pleasure cruise indefinitely prolonged. The Canton Club seldom closed before dawn on Sunday, and

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there were sure to be other parties during the week. On Sundays there were sometimes picnics on the river — picnics on a grand scale, the party being conveyed in little house-boats towed behind one or other of the companies' launches, with a boy or two to prepare the cold luncheon and cushions on which to sleep it off. The most famous of these was called "The Bottleship", which is a commentary in itself. But Shameen life was not really debauched, it was just highly stimulated and active. Most of the foreigners were young; the *taipans* (that is, the bosses) were nearly all between thirty and forty; everybody played tennis in the evening after work, or badminton, or lawn bowls (for the village elders), and there were alley bowling parties and bridge and poker in the evenings. There was even a rowing club, founded in 1835, and I had the privilege of rowing many an evening course in clinker fours or pairs behind an ex-Olympic stroke who worked for the A.P.C. Meanwhile the junks and sampans made their leisurely way, looking pityingly at the mad foreigners splashing by with such a regrettable display of haste in their useless craft. Particularly scornful were the drivers of the walky-walky boats, propelled by paddles which in turn were rotated by the feet of men on treadmills. I had my flat and an excellent cook and a growing number of friends, and there was a girl. I was so contented with my lot that I was sometimes afraid.

Even when I was at my base, life was by no means all play. The North Chinese are like the boom of a gong, steady and deep and lasting. The Cantonese suggest the rattle of a kettle-drum, light, fast-moving, unstable. Their staccato speech contrasts strongly with the Somerset burr of the Pekingese. In business they were capricious and fickle. A lower price or a fancy packing meant more to them than good tobacco. Once when one of our established brands inexplicably failed and I tried to find the reason, I was told, "The people know your cigarette is better, but they are tired of it", which reminded me of the mercurial Athenians who ostracised Aristides for no better reason than that "they were tired of hearing him called the Just". If the Hunanese reminded me of the British, the Cantonese were American. When I visited the Returned Students' Club, and learned how many thousands of Cantonese had gone to find their fortunes in the New World, this did not

seem surprising. We held our own in the trade with difficulty and our profits were small.

In Jade Street and Ivory Street (as in the Thieves' Market) the accent was on ingenuity rather than art, dexterity rather than beauty. The ivory carvers made seventeen open-work balls, one inside the other, all moving freely and with never a break, a miracle of legerdemain. When they had finished they started on another just the same. Only in cooking, art and skill were wedded, and the bird's-nest soups, the turtle and frogs' legs and broiled snake and fancy fishes, delicious messes cooked inside a pumpkin, green teas and brown teas and teas flavoured with the petals of the chrysanthemum, made Canton the Mecca of the gourmets of half the world.

I have spoken of a *rapprochement* between East and West only in so far as the concessions were made by the Chinese. What is there that the foreigner can take from the Chinese and make his own? How far can he go to meet them? The answer is that if he values his integrity he must never go further than a bow and a smile and a shake of the hand. The adventurers of Portugal went round the world taking with them not their women but their blood. Not all, but mostly, when they came to China they took Chinese wives, and compromised with the Chinese way. Now you may find Portuguese names in every warm country there is, but where is the pioneering spirit that brought them, the grand nation that bade them godspeed? In South China the Portuguese, mostly I believe of mixed blood, live side by side with the Chinese and the Europeans, betwixt and between. They are clever and courteous and happy enough, but their contribution to the world is ended, they drift with the stream. There are of course other Eurasians. A number of the early English business men took Chinese wives, and those I knew were devoted couples and had attractive, sometimes brilliant, children. It sometimes happened the other way round. In Kaifeng I met the pretty German wife of a Chinese professor at the University, a most successful marriage as far as one could see. A friend of mine, travelling near Kongmoon, was once accosted by the pathetic figure of an English girl in Chinese dress. She was under thirty but the sun had not dealt kindly with her and she looked an old woman. She had met a charming Chinese in Liverpool, and had

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married him. The rest of the story is too obvious and painful to be recorded. Now she was made to work in the fields. Could my friend help? But it was hopeless; she was bound to her husband by the law of the country she had adopted. So mixed marriage has its problems, and the children have their difficulties too.

But there are more subtle compromises than inter-marriage. The Chinese are an insidious, charming, plausible race. They have achieved a poise unknown to Western peoples which is compounded of natural grace, which is all good, and resignation, which is all bad. So many Asiatic peoples have a stock phrase meaning "never mind", "can't be helped", which recurs again and again in their conversations. This disease of resignation is so obviously infectious that the companies avoid keeping their men in one place too long. If a foreigner in China comes up against a difficulty which he can't overcome in a year or two — send another foreigner. So powerful is the defeatism which kept China stationary for so long.

Again, as I had found in Hunan, there is a Chinese way of doing things which is not our way. They work cleverly, underground, industrious as ants, yet every man for himself. One might say they are realists, as one said of the French, because they are governed by interest rather than morality. Realism is a specious philosophy, very infectious and very deadly. Charm and humour can so smooth out wrong ways. One saw examples of Englishmen who "fell" for this, who, in the stupid yet expressive phrase of the rest of our tribe, "went Chinese". They were often the nicest and most intelligent people, and their charm was by no means diminished by their predilections. They dipped deep into the Chinese philosophy and language, were fascinated perhaps by the poetry of Chinese life. They lived pleasant lives, yet were never much good to the tribe any more. Like Hamlet, they saw both points of view and lost the inclination to act.

It was only when I had thought this all out many times that I found the explanation of the insularity of the British in Hankow and their almost hysterical gaiety in Shameen. China is dynamic, positive, fighting moreover on her own ground. You cannot fight a positive with a negative, you cannot sit behind your Maginot Line in safety for long. You

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must be positive too, and that is why the British in Hankow were so incredibly British, and in Canton so blatantly European. Each community was fighting back, according to the methods of its opponent. In the face of the steady relentless mass attacks of Central China the English closed their ranks doggedly, and built their fortress of Beckenham on a sure foundation of the Superiority of the Whites, and Sport, and the Sanctity of the Home. Against the more insidious infiltrations of the South a more mobile defence was needed, built on individual activity and violent self-expression. I thought of the old lady on the Hongkong wharf almost with sympathy. I saw the official translation of an ancient report on the activities of the foreign devils transmitted to the Emperor by the Viceroy at Canton. "On ceremonial occasions," he said, "they gather together, both male and female, and posture to the music of horns." Long may they continue to posture !

5

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MEANWHILE the tempo of world madness was *accelerando*, the Gadarene race was gathering impetus and speed. I repeat, my chronology is weak. The Spanish had long been at war. The world was startled by a loan of £400,000,000 for the British Navy, figures to conjure with in those days, and we told our naval friends we expected even more hospitality from them in future. There was trouble up North, and the Sino-Japanese atmosphere was electric, but if the foreigners worried every time there was trouble up North, they would have been nervous wrecks long ago. Unhappily China was flapping her nascent wings a little too soon for some people's comfort. A wide extension of the monopoly system was menacing foreign trade, and there were gentlemen leaning on the Long Bar in the Shanghai Club who expressed the hope that the Japs would come and kick a little sense into the bloody Chinese. Perhaps there were White Russians in the back streets of Shanghai who remembered voicing similar sentiments one day in Mukden. People in Norway and Belgium and France too. . . . The German military advisers to China were not yet withdrawn. I met a delightful one, with an English wife, who regretted leaving because he said he had acquired a taste for eating babies in Belgium in 1914 and wanted to try the Cantonese variety. When I travelled I was increasingly harassed by officious young soldiers demanding my passport or forbidding my camera.

Few people can really believe in a war until it has begun, yet it was obviously not a great surprise to any of us when the blow fell. There was an incident at a bridge in Hopei. Japanese troops landed to protect their interests in Shanghai. The Chinese faltered a moment, then rallied and struck back. It had begun.

It began quietly for us. There was a Japanese destroyer lying in the Pearl river. Arrogantly she continued to lie there

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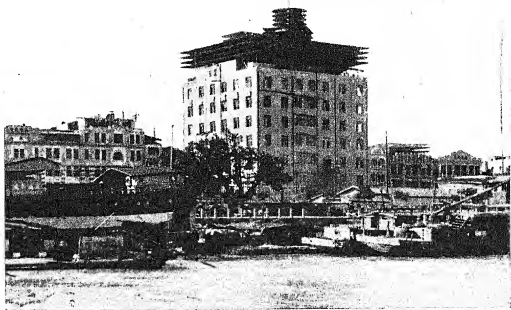
a day or two after hostilities had officially begun, making no gesture but silence, unmolested by the Chinese. Was this to be another typically oriental war, with big gestures but few people hurt? I was reminded of schoolboy boxing — "Don't let us get too serious about it, let us keep our tempers". The foreigners organised air raid precautions as best they might. Cellars of banks were appointed as shelters for women and children. The chief danger seemed to be an attempt by panic-stricken Chinese, in the event of a raid, making a rush for the dubious security of Shameen, so we made rather pathetic dispositions for defence. As people could make landings at any point from the river, our thirty or forty able-bodied men armed with canes, tin hats and arm-bands were more of a gesture than a serious attempt to defend our two miles of coast-line. The steamers and tows to Hongkong were loaded heavily with the more prosperous Cantonese, evacuating with their families and household goods to the British colony. Some of the foreign women and children went too, and there was a heavy air of suspense as we waited for something to happen. We did not have to wait long. One day the Japanese destroyer cast off and slipped down the river, and I was woken up at dawn next day by a curious popping noise, and then spied the A.A. bursts from my window. Full of enthusiasm I leapt from my bed, seized my tin hat and other insignia, and sprinted to my appointed post outside the Shameen police station. The station was locked, and showed no sign of life, and it was not until half an hour later that the older hands came wandering along in twos and threes. The foreigners were not to be hurried from the security of their mosquito nets by a trifle like a Japanese air raid. As time passed, and even in the most frightful raids the Chinese, tractable and law-abiding to the last, made no attempt to go where they were forbidden, these parades of the Defence Corps lapsed and finally vanished. They had served their purpose by giving us something to do at first, and by striking the right note of studied indifference, except for my own lapse, at the beginning of what was to be a trying time.

After the first raid the flow of refugees multiplied till the wharves were black with people, and every outgoing junk was loaded with rich and poor, male and female, all carrying innumerable bundles and packages and looking uneasily up

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at the skies. That first raid was not a great success. It was directed, like hundreds of subsequent attacks, at the railways, and I heard later that a bomb fell through the narrow gap in the Sheklung bridge, the plating I had walked across having been removed the day before. It was reported that one — two — more Japanese aircraft had been shot down, and morale was fairly high. The public did not know that a year before a Canton Government Department had entered into negotiations with a British armament firm, represented in Shameen, for big supplies of anti-aircraft ammunition. The price quoted would have given the Chinese negotiators a small fortune to put in their pockets, but they held out for more and the deal fell through. Now they came again, cash in hand : but they had reckoned without British rearmament, and they were quoted a price nearly double the original, with delivery guaranteed in 1940.

News began to come in. The Chinese were falling back in the North, but holding their own in Shanghai. We heard with indignation that falling shrapnel had interrupted a game of cricket at the Shanghai Race Club. Stray bombs dropped by Chinese aircraft in difficulties killed hundreds of people in Shanghai, including a number of foreigners. The Chinese dollar slumped, then recovered, and remained amazingly steady for almost a year of war. By fits and starts things grew worse and the war became more real. The first big attack on the civil population of Canton came, and the second and many more. Reuter's correspondent was much impugned as a sensationalist and spreader of alarm and despondency because he said in a despatch that the streets of Canton were red with blood. He was not far wrong. At least he did not mention the stink of charred and putrefying flesh that floated to us on the northerly breezes as the raids grew too heavy for the cleaning-up squads. Protective preparations went belatedly forward. I never heard of a decent dug-out shelter in Canton from start to finish except that of the Mayor, but there were other devices. A system of sirens was rapidly installed and never let us down. All the considerable buildings in the city had an extra roof of bamboo trellis fitted over the top, the idea being that the bomb would strike the trellis first and explode harmlessly in the air. All the cocks and cockerels in



A.R.P. AT CANTON



VIEW FROM CHEUNGCHOW ISLAND

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Waichow were slaughtered because it was understood that their crowing at night was a guide to hostile aircraft. Spy fever raged, not without reason. When the first night raid occurred, all electricity was turned off at the mains, and any Chinese showing a light was liable to receive, not a tap on the door and a warning, but a bullet through the window.

One evening I went with a friend to the German Club, on the north side of the city, near the airfield. The beer was good there, and the company congenial. The alarm went, and we waited, sipping our beer in the dark gardens. All the world now knows the chill along the spine caused by the first wail of sirens, and we were all shaken out of our composure by the eerie shriek of the second alarm striking up in the darkness near by. Then came the hum of engines, and three aircraft flew over in formation with their navigation lights blazing and their identification lights signalling rapidly. A series of green and white Very lights shot up, pointing the way to the airfield, the last flying up on the very boundary, too near to us for comfort. We crouched under the stairs while the bombs dropped; the lights on the aircraft went out as they flew away, and as our ears recovered from the blast we heard shouts and pistol shots as the police hunted the traitors in the dark. Perhaps they killed some of them; there were always plenty more.

After about three weeks of war my new *taipan* arrived, fresh from home leave, full of energy and plans. Like all newcomers he was, I am sure, disposed to think things were not as bad as they had been made out, though he was too polite to say so. To my delight the Japs did us proud; a flying-boat dived repeatedly out of the cloud and dropped bombs on Wongsha station, not three hundred yards from Shameen, and I went down to Hongkong for a long week-end feeling mildly heroic. Hongkong was crammed with refugees, poor Chinese from the South in their millions and rich Chinese from Shanghai and even further away, as well as most of the foreign women of standing from all over China. Even the latter could not mask the beauty of Hongkong, though their shrieks of complaint filled every office and their protests crowded out the war news from the papers. When I went to Repulse Bay the sun-bathers on the beach caused me a momentary qualm, as I

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took them for more corpses, but beauty and security soon had their effect.

I went out to Cheungchow island, an hour by ferry, and found a little fairyland, a little village crowded with junks at the landing-place, little paths round the cliffs covered with thrift and rock roses, little bungalows with their gardens ablaze with flowers and shrubs. Back in Hongkong I went to dinner with the Government official I had seen up the North river. I hope I was too polite to show my surprise, when I reached his almost inaccessible house, at being received by my host in a blue coolie-suit, his French wife in a ravishing Chinese dress, and his brother-in-law the artist in nothing at all ; but I did feel horribly over-dressed for once in my life. We spent an evening belonging to another world, sitting on the floor — there did not seem to be any chairs — and playing Brandenburg concertos on the gramophone.

I returned refreshed to a Canton that was settling down to war. Already the incoming boats were overloaded with refugees returning from a refuge they had found too costly, and indeed until the bitter end this shuttle service continued, as the hundreds fleeing from the bombs every day passed the hundreds fleeing from the equally deadly profiteers of Hongkong. Air raid alarms continued to sound two or three times daily, but the Japanese were now concentrating on the railways and only by fits and starts made serious attacks on the civil population or the termini. To the last, however, these recurrent alarms were an affliction to everyone, first because one could never be quite sure that they would not affect the city ; secondly, because all power was turned off at the plants after the second (urgent) alarm, which meant no lights, no lifts to our apartments, and no fans. These privations, small enough in the perspective of war, are a not inconsiderable affliction in the Canton summer. Our office was in the city, and when the alarm sounded we never knew whether to evacuate by boat to Shameen, a mile away (the roads were apt to be closed), or to carry on with what we were doing. "Business as usual" was always our target, and we had a few narrow escapes through trying to achieve it. But stocks were coming in, limited by our Shanghai factories' difficulties, and as our competitors were in a worse state we began to show a profit for the first time in

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years. Most remarkable of all, we were able to get the money away with only the most moderate remittance fees. My *taipan* got things organised where I had only contrived expedients. Oil lamps and curtains in the Club let us resume our interrupted dissipations. Women were returning by twos and threes as the danger of local disturbance disappeared, and the Japanese showed themselves good marksmen in so far as missing Shameen was concerned. My *taipan* brought up his wife, one of the most beautiful women I have ever seen, and a baby daughter added a domestic touch, sorely needed in our establishment. The Sunday picnics were resumed, the ordinary services and entertainments (such as they were) of the city carried on. On Shameen the Rotary women rolled bandages on Mondays, the British Legion ladies rolled bandages on Tuesdays, and the Unclassified women on Wednesdays, and heaven help any women who strayed into the wrong category. A bee in a strange hive would have a better prospect of survival. So we did our bit ! But what we did do, what the British and other foreigners all over China were doing, as they had always done before, was to carry on, making the best of the situation of the moment, and keeping a good heart.

I went on my travels again. I went up the West river by boat, and very lovely it was. As ever, the river life of South China was the best and most genuine. As soon as I set foot on shore, and I stopped at every town, I found stagnation and dullness, though the surroundings were beautiful. I had at last to face the sad fact that scenery and commerce do not go together. Northern and Western Kwangtung are consistently mountainous, and nobody is very rich or very likely to be. From some of the towns there was a road running inland with a bus service, and I got up peevishly at dawn to get a seat in the cramped wheezy buses to see where they went. The towns I reached were even more depressed than the river towns, but still the population smoked cigarettes and I had to go to them. This remote sleepy region offered advantages which others had seen. All the way from Shanghai to Hongkong by foreign steamers, and thence up the river by steamer or tow or sampan, came rich refugees from big cities, women for the most part, and mostly with babies. Their elegant attire and *soigné* complexions made an odd contrast with the farmers' wives who

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were the usual passengers in the buses ; but they are all tough underneath, these Chinese, and they put a good face on it. One of the ladies changed her dress in the bus, discarding her warm travelling gown, put on for a night in the tow, for something more suitable to the sweltering heat. She disclosed in doing so only the all-embracing and depressingly utilitarian under-garments that Chinese ladies affect, but incurred the strong disapproval of my little Cantonese interpreter, who did not think much of these loose women from Shanghai and thanked the Lord, or whatever power it is that Chinese acknowledge, that he was never likely to go there. Later I went to the East river again, this time by car and at night, as both road and railway were subject to enemy attack. Waichow was unchanged except for the absence of cockerels, and I only remember vividly a moment when the fuses blew out and we were stranded, silent and lonely, in the moonless night. Not silent for long. We were surrounded by paddy fields, under water at this period, and each field contained a thousand frogs and a million cicadas. The croaking of the one and the thin, throbbing screech of the other swelled as our ears became attuned, the menacing toccata swung from *crescendo* to *fortissimo*, till I felt I had to shout to make myself heard by the chauffeur beside me, over the gigantic volume of baleful sound. I expected the king frog at any minute to come lumbering out of the water with his myrmidons, to leave only a white skeleton of an Englishman gleaming in the black stagnant pools. When the lights flashed on again I felt very silly. Civilisation does not cure one of being afraid of the dark.

I have been anxious in this chapter not to exaggerate the effect the war on their doorstep had on the foreigners in Canton. We have seen even in England how quickly a period of freedom from attack breeds the illusion of security. After a week or two in which no aeroplanes were seen to implement the daily alarms, the new skin grew as it were over the city's wounds and its life became practically normal again. How much more did this apply to us spectators, who, provided we kept off Tom Tiddler's ground, were apparently in no personal danger. In spite of the protests of the Consul-General we continued to watch the raids from the Shameen rooftops, and we soon became familiar with those cauliflowers of smoke that gladdened

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the heart of Bruno Mussolini as he sailed over Abyssinia. The Japanese were practically unopposed, though one day we saw a Chinese fighter shot down, and occasionally the Ack-Ack bursts came near enough to the bombers to break up the formations. Sometimes we saw them go for the cement works to the north. They never hit them. Sometimes they attacked the Ack-Ack batteries to the south ; they never silenced them. Frequently they attacked the two railway stations, yet they were used right to the end. They bombed the railways themselves every day, and sometimes strafed trains, but every day without fail the expresses rattled in from Hankow and Canton. They attacked the people of China in their homes : one day they will be avenged. There was, of course, terrible suffering ; the hospitals were a shambles, desperately short of doctors, and the Salvation Army and other institutions did what they could to provide relief ; little enough indeed, for it was a task for hundreds being attempted by a handful. One day one of our junior Chinese clerks asked for a day off — not to attend the funeral of his grandmother, but to bury his father and mother and do something for his sister who was blinded. One is so helpless against disaster on that scale, and being helpless spectators, we did what we could and tried to forget what we could not.

The English Commissioner of the Salt Revenue Administration wished to bolster up the morale of his staff. He showed them a map, showing to scale the small areas actually destroyed by bombs. He told them the population of Canton and the small number actually killed. Finally he summed up his address with the words, " So you see you have as much chance of getting hit in a raid as of winning a prize in the State Lottery". Whereupon one poor little man went green with fright and just managed to stammer, " But I *did* win a prize in the State Lottery ! " thus completely spoiling the effect. But economic necessity was stronger than fear, and the city lived on with hatred growing in its heart.

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UNDAUNTED by the war, the Company looked round for fresh fields. The bloody goings-on in Shanghai temporarily put some of our Chinese rivals out of action, and we must not miss the chance. There was only one region where we did not occupy a fair share of the business, and that was Kwangsi province, so to Kwangsi I went. In fact I made a number of journeys there in a period covering nearly a year, but I shall condense my experiences.

Kwangsi lies to the west of Kwangtung and slightly to the north, and a narrowing strip of Kwangtung stretching to the west prevents Kwangsi from touching the coast. Its access to the great world is by the West river, which is navigable to steamers up to Wuchow, the biggest Kwangsi port in the right-hand bottom corner, so to speak, of the province, at the confluence of the West and Fu (or Kwei) rivers. Going upstream, the West river bends to the west after Wuchow, right across the province to Nanning, then south to Lungchow and the Indo-China border. The Kwei river goes up nor'-nor'-west to Kweilin and the Hunan border, which I have mentioned before.

So much for geography. Ethnologically, Kwangsi has every excuse for disunity. It contains the outer fringes of the two peoples of the North and South. Along the West river Cantonese is spoken, up the Kwei river they speak a comprehensible variant of Mandarin. Yet the population of this peculiar province is politically more solid than that of any other, more independent, more province-conscious. It is a complete state within the State. This admirable state of affairs was achieved apparently by a small group of determined men, who bullied and organised the mixed population to such purpose that from being one of the most backward provinces in China, it attained in a very few years the title "The Model Province", and in spite of being numerically amongst the smallest, Kwangsi stood among the greatest in military repute. It is hard to see how

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this was achieved except by the dominant personality of one man aided by faithful colleagues, for this small state has little wealth to draw on, especially compared with the wonderful rice fields of the Lake and Delta, and only about eight million citizens (to perhaps thirty millions in Hunan). Be that as it may, Kwangsi was almost the last of the provinces to acknowledge the authority of Chiang's Central Government at Nanking, and, as I have recorded, the acknowledgement was only made after a display of force by generals Pai and Li in 1936. Thus it was an act of union, not a submission, and when I first came to Kwangsi, only just over a year later, the two generals were already standing next to Chiang in his Council of War.

I must digress for a moment to explain the situation as far as our business was concerned. In the early days each province imposed taxes at the discretion of the Governor. Later an expanding Central Government instituted a Consolidated Tax applying to cigarettes amongst other goods, whereby goods were taxed on manufacture, the revenue going direct to the Central Government, and were thereafter immune from further taxation. This arrangement did not appeal to the truculent Kwangsi Government, who promptly declared a provincial monopoly for cigarettes and set up a factory of their own. Like other governments who have gone into business on their own account, they found it harder than it looked. Reared to cigarette-smoking on the products of the "Fragrant Tobacco Company", as we were then affectionately termed, the men of Kwangsi turned up their flat noses at the monopoly's crude imitation. Our Company, always ready to support the Central Government within reason, sent no more cigarettes to Wuchow, and everybody sat back and waited for the monopoly to die a natural death. Unfortunately the Provincial Government devised a scheme whereby they lost neither their revenue nor their dignity. They gave permission to the cigarette companies to sell their goods to Kwangsi on payment of taxes fixed according to the value of the goods as assessed by the monopoly. We continued to hang back, and when we decided to accept the inevitable, found ourselves *persona non grata* with the local authority, and the tax on our brands double that on anybody else's. But, with few Chinese cigarettes coming forward, revenues were dropping, and it seemed likely that the Provincial

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Government would be more amenable.

Access to Wuchow was via Samshui and up the West river by steamer. The West river steamers were a remarkable fleet. The oldest was the *Sainam*, a weird little stern-wheeler now in Chinese hands, but dating back to the good old and probably quite mythical days when she was Queen of the River and the first-class passengers dressed for dinner. At the opposite extreme was the *Kong-So* and her sisters, who sailed under the British flag. Their owners were Hongkong Chinese, and to fulfil the requirements of registration they had a few British officers, a captain, a chief engineer and sometimes a mate or purser. The West river is surely the last refuge of the destitute who hold masters' certificates. Mostly they were incredibly aged; many of them drank rather a lot; one and all, one imagined, they had had "a bit of bad luck" at some stage of their careers. The steering was often left to the Chinese mate, the engines acknowledged only the voice of the Chinese engineer, but still the captain and the chief ruled in faded state, wearing the noble insignia of their office only when the arrival of their ship at Hongkong or the visit of a distinguished guest impelled them to cover the upper half of their torso at all. I travelled in dirty cabins, not mere first-class but super-first-class, and ate fly-blown food and looked out at the green banks from the neutral shelter of the Flag.

The West river, like its mightier fellows, can be very docile or very fierce. It is capable of a rise of fifty feet, and though the city of Wuchow sits high up on the green, grass-covered banks, its main streets are apt to be flooded once or twice a year. In order that the ships may have access to the land, the Customs and the various trading companies have erections called *pais* (pronounced "pies"). These *pais* are the biggest house-boats since the Ark. On huge square raft-like hulls, houses of two or three stories contain offices and warehouses, the whole covered by sloping roofs with chimneys and surmounted by the inevitable flagpole. The ship is moored to the *pai*, the *pai* is anchored to the shore, and huge gangways bring cargo and pedestrians from the beach. The whole issue slides up and down the bank as the river rises and falls. Wuchow itself is a thriving port, handling the big cargoes of wood-oil, tea-oil and other produce brought by countless small craft from the interior. It has the

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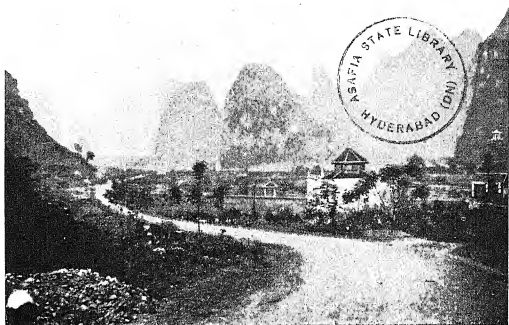
usual arcaded pavements, and several macadamised streets in bad repair. I believe one local official had a motor car, but as there was not more than a mile of road all told, and no roads whatever leading to the country, this seemed to me to be a monument either to somebody's vanity or to somebody else's salesmanship.

Wuchow was what I might call a basic Treaty Port. It had Treaty Port status : it had a Customs House with foreign Commissioner and Harbour Master : it had representatives of the two oil companies, A.P.C. and "Socony", and of our Company (myself) : it had a Mission hospital and a billiard table, and was visited regularly by British, occasionally by American, gunboats. It had even a tiny golf club, laid out in the days when there were more foreigners, now gallantly maintained by a membership of four. And that, as far as foreigners were concerned, was the lot. When I first got there the two oil companies were managed each by a married couple, with a bachelor assistant ; the Commissioner of Customs and the Harbour Master were both married, and as I enjoyed the hospitality of the A.P.C. whenever I was in Wuchow, I had a pleasant, domesticated refuge to fall back on after my arduous or tedious travels.

I suppose Kwangsi has about the area of England and Wales, and supports less than one-fifth of the population. There is always a hill in sight in Kwangsi. I travelled by road, the road-head being five miles up-river from Wuchow. The surface was not so good as that of the Hunan roads, and the vehicles were alarming. Anyone who has charged a herd of cattle in a 1927 Ford, with a Chinese driver and no brakes at all, will know what I mean. We had as yet practically no business in Kwangsi, so in that respect my first journeys were depressing. The old capital, Nanning, is on the West river about three hundred miles from Wuchow. I looked at all the towns on the way, and found them remarkably empty and "dead", but Nanning itself was quite a flourishing city, with good prospects. Entertained here by a Chinese merchant, I made my first acquaintance with the Kwangsi solution of the problem of Public Morals. There was a considerable reformatory urge at work in China during the early 'thirties, expressed sometimes in the New Life Movement's doctrines, sometimes in

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other ways. The movement was mainly directed at the young, and associated itself with students' demonstrations and the fostering of the sense of public responsibility. Sometimes it would be forbidden, in certain towns, to smoke in the streets, and infinitesimal Boy Scouts would enforce the law. The Chinese people, tractable as ever, did as they were told for a week or so and then forgot about it. Kwangsi took keenly to this idea of a New Deal in private life. One could hardly oppose smoking when cigarettes were provided under the aegis of the benevolent Government, so they attacked what Americans call the Vice Racket. There was no doubt that Chinese gentlemen were wasting a lot of money on the girls, so the girls must go. They went. In Wuchow they went as far as the river, where they were soon organised on several enormous *pais*. In other cities, if they could not take to the water, they established themselves at the outskirts in a series of houses, to be known as the "Special Areas", where nobody lived who was not connected with the profession. Thus the public conscience was appeased, vice and extravagance were banished from the city's bosom, "face" was restored — and everybody had just as good a time as before. My hosts were wont to take me on a grand tour of the Special Areas. We plunged into doorways, up and down stairs, along dark passages; on every door were two or three photographs of the occupants of the room, with their names and a few well-chosen words of commendation. If we went in and paid a social call, it was usual to leave a tip on leaving. Sometimes before a dinner party we went round and collected whole armfuls of girls to entertain us with song, for which there was a recognised charge. I used to find these calls trying, for though the attraction of femininity *per se* increases in inverse proportion to supply, and I was often weeks, sometimes months without seeing a woman socially, there are limits. And anyway I had learned so little Cantonese that my intercourse with the ladies was limited to fatuous compliments passed through an interpreter and quasi-amorous gestures. The Kwangsi dinner parties were just as gay as any in Hunan, the main difference being that the girls played a kind of zither, hitting the strings with little hammers, which was not offensive compared with the excruciating two-stringed violin of the North. Of course, they sang just the same. . . .



ROAD TO KWEILIN



ROAD TO CHANGSHA

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Having spied out the potentialities of Nanning, I retraced my steps for a hundred miles to Kweiyuen, where the road branches north. At Kweiyuen I found a Government hostel for travellers, pleasantly clean and quiet, but unfortunately near another of those ornamental lakes where mosquitoes abound. I got up early and watched an old man fishing for frogs among the lotus leaves, with a rod and line and a locust for bait. In Kwangsi as in Hunan the motorist's course is regularly punctuated by ferries. In Kwangsi they were extremely good. The large pontoon, capable sometimes of holding two laden buses, was moved across by a launch, if the river was wide as at Kweiyuen, otherwise by men poling or by the principle of the English drag. The banks were invariably steep, and a lot of people have been drowned through cars running down, straight across the pontoon and into the river. It was a hair-raising performance in the dilapidated cars we were using, and even when I walked down the slope I was terrified for my baggage. However, judicious use of reverse gear always saved the situation, and the series of ferries was safely crossed.

Liuchow, the next big town on the road, is right in the centre of the province, astride the third big Kwangsi river, which runs from the west down to the south-east corner, joining the West river some distance above Wuchow. There was a military airfield at Liuchow, and a group of American pilots. It was a busy little town, and by this stage of my journey I began to see signs of the North. More people spoke Mandarin than Cantonese; they were sturdier physically and the streets were more alive. The natives of this region wear a peculiar hat; it is a conical straw, yet the cone itself does not sit upon the head but is supported two inches above it by a light bamboo framework or crown. I think they get the idea from the scenery, which is unique. For fifty miles between Liuchow and Kweilin the traveller sees nothing but little precipitous limestone hills or tors, up to four hundred feet in height, scattered haphazard in all directions. It is barren country on the whole, and these gap-toothed erections give it an eerie, other-planet air. The view along the winding streams at some of the ferries can be unbelievably beautiful, utterly fantastic, the sort of thing one expected in China and seldom found.

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On the way to Kweilin I stayed the first of many nights with the Catholic Mission. They were mostly American priests, some of them of Irish extraction, and they were all first-rate men. There was a fierce positiveness about their religion which contrasted strongly with the negation of the other missionaries. While the weary-looking married couples of the Protestant missions took a little of what they did not particularly want, the Catholics took nothing of what they wanted passionately. They suffered supreme hardships without dismay. One of them suffered agonies from rheumatism, yet continued to work in a damp valley until he died, at the age of thirty, of rheumatic fever. They denied themselves in their lives, and they denied themselves the undying privilege of fatherhood. I do not myself believe in any attempt to convert any people from the religion of their race, but these Catholics were making at least a glorious gesture. One of them had been a great wrestler in America. He once threw two soldiers out of the convent — over a twelve-foot wall, but I felt his greatest, most difficult victory was against his particular devil. One or other of the Fathers at Laipo was often away, striding over the rocky hills, seeing to the poor, pulling out their teeth, tending their physical and spiritual ailments, but there was always a welcome, a meal and a bed for me or any other wayfarer, and eager, intelligent questions about the outer world of which our hosts saw so little. Later, I sometimes met them down at Wuchow, where they enhanced their popularity still further by playing golf a little worse than anybody else. This waste, as I regarded it, of good lives depressed me very much.

At Kweilin we were over four hundred miles from Wuchow by road, though little more than half as the crow flies or the Fu river flows. A new government needs a new capital, so the seat of government had been removed from Nanning up to Kweilin. Kweilin was a boom town in 1937 and 1938. For one thing, the transfer of the Government and its offices brought with it a flood of new capital, and extensive building was going on, and the shops, hitherto backward and poorly stocked, were filling with expensive articles on sale at fat prices. For another, Kweilin was still subject to the Great Illusion. The Illusion I refer to is that this city Will Not Be Bombed. Various factors, such as climate, geographical position, lack of

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importance as a military target and allegedly "powerful air defences" go to the building-up of the Illusion, but its great rock and foundation always lies in the fact that the city has not been bombed before. The Illusion obtained in Wuchow, Kweilin, Kweichow and many other Western Chinese cities, nor, as we now see, is it confined to China. One can remember when it was shared by Bath and Berlin, Canterbury and Rome. When disillusion comes, it is all the more disastrous for being unexpected. So Kweilin was a lively spot, with new banks and shops springing up, new hotels crammed from their opening date with Government officials and prosperous refugees. Not all the refugees were wealthy. No people are greater exploiters than the Chinese of the inexorable law of supply and demand, and prices rose steadily and mercilessly.

Through Kweilin runs the river, not the weighty, turgid flood that swings by most Chinese cities, but a pretty blue river, running swiftly, with crystal-clear water and a pebbly bottom. Along its banks are the Kwangsi tors, one of them crowned with a pagoda at its precipitous tip; along the margin the junks and sampans are moored that are strong enough to tear down the rapids and not too big or of too deep a draught to be hauled upstream. At Kweilin as elsewhere in Kwangsi much entertaining was done on the water, and our dealer entertained us in a capacious sampan moored out in the stream.

After this preliminary "look-see" I returned to Canton and did not go back to Kwangsi until November 1937. We were anticipating the final establishment of Consolidated Tax in the province, and were holding certain stocks in readiness for the day. Finally the awaited decree was issued by the Central Government, and I sped to Kweilin. There I found a highly equivocal situation. I first called on the provincial Finance Minister, Mr. Wang Chung Ngok, who was acting as chief of the legislature in the absence of the generals. He received me, to my surprise, very promptly. He had the rare reputation of being an honest public servant, and his brusque, straightforward manner and terse answers to my questions — he spoke both Cantonese and Mandarin with a Gloucestershire accent — made an excellent impression. Yes, the Central Government had indeed announced its intention of instituting Consolidated Tax, but until funds were forthcoming to

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reimburse the Provincial Treasury for the loss of the cigarette revenues, it was likely that the present system of taxation would continue. Good morning. So I went across the road to a shop which was in process of being converted to house the offices of the Consolidated Tax Administration, etc. etc., of the Chinese Government, as a fine new sign announced to anybody who might be interested. Inside I found the chief, Mr. Huang Tao, and he was suggestively pleased to see us. One gathered he had not had many callers, and indeed his position was not enviable. It was only a matter of time, he kept saying over and over again. Final negotiations were going forward in Chungking, and everything would come right very soon. Meanwhile we could continue to sell cigarettes in Kwangsi under the old arrangement, if we so desired. We asked him to dinner to give him "face", a commodity of which he was badly in need, and despatched the appropriate telegrams. While we were waiting for an answer I went up north to Chuanchow, on the Kwangsi-Hunan border, thus completing my circular tour. As I expected, I found it a sleepy little hole, and I nearly froze to death because the temperature dropped from 72° to 34° F. in two days. In South China there is not much spring or autumn, and it seldom freezes anywhere near sea level, but winter is very chilly when it comes, with cold penetrating north winds and rain. I returned to a Shameen preparing for Christmas festivities, but decided myself to return to Wuchow, where there were also to be parties. The day I set out for my Christmas visit Wuchow was bombed, and a great swath was mown out of the centre of the city. As I chugged up the West river, enjoying the society of some Catholic priests who had brought some whisky as a Christmas present for one of their brethren up-river but decided to save Customs dues by anticipating his hospitality, we passed another steamer going downstream in which were my hostess and her baby, escorted by my host, and most of the other ladies of Wuchow, evacuating to Hongkong. When I arrived, I saw why. We had a rather drunken and desperate Christmas, officers from a gunboat and the remaining men, not at all the domestic affair I had planned.

When I next came to Wuchow most of the foreign personnel had changed. Both oil companies were now represented by bachelors, and there was a new Commissioner of Customs, one

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of the most picturesque of the English Commissioners. He was on the verge of retiring and had a twinkling eye, a partiality for good wine and cigars, and a tremendous fund of China reminiscence. Amongst other things he had actually seen many of the more picturesque official tortures, and his gusto in describing them was enthralling if not pretty. His wife was a great lover of animals, and the house was seething with fauna. A mournful Great Dane as big as a donkey moaned, dribbling, around the house. She was called Freya, and her grief I gathered was for her nine brothers and sisters who had once roved in one big happy pack around a succession of Commissioners' Residences. The time had come for the family to go on home leave, and surprisingly enough it had not proved easy to find a friend willing to accommodate ten Great Danes for the year or so of their mistress' absence. Finally when they were in despair a little man had appeared from nowhere and undertaken to look after the whole herd. He had a kind face, and he duly took over his precious charges. How was the poor mistress to know that he was an enthusiastic amateur vivisector? Freya, herself unbecomingly gashed in several places, was the only survivor. There were one or two rabbits hopping round the drawing-room, but what embarrassed me most was the family of doves which, when they were not flying peevishly around, roosted on the verandah wall just above my head. One's social call on the Commissioner is quite enough of a strain without the addition of a horrid doubt whether the doves are house-trained, and if the worst came to the worst, whether one should pretend not to notice. They weren't, but I need not have worried; the Commissioner from long experience had organised for this sort of thing, and in no time after "the worst", his sanitary squad was on the scene with warm water, mops and cloths, and the polite conversation continued almost without interruption. So there was always hospitality with the Commissioner, and with the Harbour Master and his cheery Russian wife; at least once a week a British gunboat came up the river, and there were other casual visitors. There was a lady from Hongkong who arrived with introductions that could not be disregarded and the desire to travel up to Nanning and down through Indo-China to Hanoi — by herself. This enterprise displeased the Wuchow foreigners very much, since they

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argued, wrongly, that she was certain to get in a mess and, rightly, that if she did they would be expected to get her out of it. In the end she did get to Hanoi triumphantly, with a good deal of assistance from the oil companies, but unfortunately found that no ship was sailing that week for Hongkong and had to come all the way back the same way. Actually she was a nice woman ; I suppose, like professionals the world over, we resented an amateur intruding on our preserves.

Then there was the Military Mission, comprising a wing-commander, a gunner and an intelligence officer who arrived from Hongkong to tour the Kwangsi airfields. They were a bright lot. The gunner was all right except that he was very cold. He had been told to travel light, and had arrived in the middle of a Kwangsi winter in a cotton shirt and shorts, carrying a toothbrush. His chattering teeth were a source of minor irritation. The Intelligence officer was really very clever, but he would get so dreadfully drunk. The wing-commander, at a big public dinner, made a speech in which he said, " You Chinese must realise that we British are here, not to help China but to get as much out of China as we can ! " — a sentiment which annoyed the worthy foreign merchants only less than it embarrassed the sensitive and hospitable Chinese. Later on two of the Chinese banks opened up branches in Kwangsi, and sent some of their English-speaking staff down. They were a lively and hospitable crowd, and we saw a lot of them. The whisky flowed freely. I remember one party in a little boat on the Fu river, when one of the bachelors cut his foot badly on a broken bottle. Without hesitation our hosts filled a basin with whisky, and the bachelor sat for the rest of the evening with his foot in the bowl, while his blood slowly encarnadined the amber fluid. Medically sound as this treatment was, I have often since shuddered to think of the waste of good whisky.

As 1938 moved on I travelled more and more in Kwangsi. I went down to Lungchow near the borders of Indo-China — the road from Nanning running south-west, first over flat prairie-like country, later, as we neared the source of the West river, crawling round the sides of thickly overgrown mountains. I went north-west from Nanning up to Po-sch, near the borders of Yunnan. Here I found a quiet little town smelling of opium, standing at one end of one of these ancient trade routes which

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have remained unchanged because Nature refuses passage to roads or rivers, and which flourished particularly after the introduction of opium. Even here, though the population was small and poor, we had to set up an agency and distribute our cigarettes. One morning in bed in Liuchow, travelling with another Englishman, I was woken up by the air raid alarm, and watched a fleet of Japanese bombers raining their cargoes on the airfield. We could see the bombs falling from the machines with the fluency, but not the accuracy, of the drop-pings of the Commissioner's pigeons. We had a social breakfast that day, guests, multifarious dishes, warm rice wine and all, at nine in the morning, hardly fair treatment for a stomach already unsettled by the proximity of the bombing. Next time I came to Liuchow the house where I had slept had vanished, and the street was just a mass of rubble. I went to Kweilin for more negotiations with the Finance Bureau, where I got little satisfaction. The hotels were all full, so we stayed in a boat on the river. It was a very public existence. The boat was perhaps thirty feet long, broad and flat-bottomed. My companions and I occupied the main cabin, with sides wide open to the gaze of the rest of the river population. The small compartment at the stern was the home of the owner and his family — two old men, two old women, a young man, a couple of young women and a few babies with floats tied round their middles. The two households lived in this proximity with no discomfort, providing an object lesson in good manners. When occasion demanded, the women looked the other way, and I did likewise. If I needed a wash I just stepped into the water, if I needed exercise I went for a swim. It was all very convenient.

From here I made a journey through one of the most lovely regions in all China, one of two places visited by Chinese poets and artists in search of inspiration for their traditional themes. We took a smaller boat, again with an extensive crew largely composed of ineffectives, and rowed and drifted down the Fu river. There were rapids to be negotiated, and in the deeper stretches I swam along beside the boat. The upstream traffic was having a hard time, trackers, helped by sail, walking up the banks with a long rope to drag the junks up the slower reaches, while at the rapids the rope was anchored upstream

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and all hands wound a capstan on the boat. The screech of the capstans and the chants, or shanties, of the boatmen still ring in my ears.

As we sped easily down, the banks, flat at first, rose high on both sides in gorges and cliffs and pinnacles, and as we anchored for the night I could feel the fabulous indentations, lit only by the stars, snarling all around me. It was an anticlimax to reach the shoddy little city of Ping Lok and my waiting car.

FAREWELL TO CANTON

I LEFT Canton, two chapters ago, settling down to war. The city remained much the same, outwardly, from the first month of war until a few days before its fall. There were recurrent periods of ferocious bombing, when death tore through the city and the stream of refugees dashed to and fro like ants when their nest is disturbed. There were longer periods in between, when the daily sirens meant only remote raids on the railways, which did not worry us very much, and business was very much "as usual". Only the dollar was falling slowly, slowly, and the cost of living gradually rose. Meanwhile the war was moving on. Chiang sacrificed almost the whole of his small first-rate army in Shanghai. The men fought with unbelievable bravery and fell almost to a man; after they had held out so unexpectedly long, the rapid Japanese advance to, and beyond, Nanking was a bitter disappointment. The hideous details of the rape of Nanking trickled through slowly, horrifying us all less than they might have if we had heard the full truth at one blow. Madame Chiang was put in charge of the Chinese Air Force, which fought bravely but only for a moment with its slender resources. Later, re-formed with limited American and British help, it spasmodically did good work, as in a big air battle one day over Hankow. Over Canton it made few appearances. A brave Englishman put together about thirty Gladiators from England on Canton aerodrome, in the face of almost daily bombings by the Japanese, and his spectacular test flights over the city did all our hearts good. The Chinese all thought it was a Chinese pilot, and applauded loudly. One day, helped by a lucky shot among the bombs, a flight of Gladiators shot down all of six Japanese bombers over the North river. This was the exception, however, and day after day we saw the bombers drone over, drop their bombs when they felt like it, and turn back for their base, seldom having been even inconvenienced by the

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anti-aircraft. They were usually naval aircraft, based, we presumed, on carriers. Their performance was not discreditable on the whole, for they had no forced landings that I ever heard of, and never hit Shameen though they pulverised Wongsha station only a quarter of a mile away.

Socially I was enjoying life. One saw a certain amount of the better-class Chinese at such places as the University, a Sino-American affair, and at the meetings of international clubs in the city. Sunday picnics continued to follow the hectic Saturday nights at the Club. I saw a lot of one Richard, the German Consul. He was a most delightful young man, with a well-educated and discerning mind, yet a thoroughly loyal servant of his government. I used to be really afraid of the Nazis when I found among their servants the intelligent and well-informed. Richard and I, with Tommy of the U.S. Consulate, spent happy hours together settling the fate of the world. The last I heard of him was a postcard written in Berlin in August 1939 in which he said, "I feel you are taking the international situation far too seriously".

Almost the day war began we had been compelled, in our Company, to execute that *volte-face* so depressing to the salesman — to stop trying to widen the field for selling cigarettes and concentrate on producing as many as we could and distributing them fairly among our old customers. Although reconstruction and re-establishment of order in Shanghai later eased the situation somewhat, we were never again troubled about getting rid of any stocks we had available at our markets. In a world tottering to its downfall it was not easy to get raw materials, manufacture our goods and distribute them behind the lines, as it were, of a country at war.

This was not merely a local problem for us in Canton. At Hankow we had great cigarette and printing factories rapidly being strangled to death now that the Yangtse was closed to all shipping. But though the river might be finished there was the overland route, the new railway, and we began to receive all kinds of factory materials for re-shipment to Hankow. So I went along to the station.

Unfortunately we were not the only merchants to think of the railway. The chaos in those early days at the station was unbelievable. The platforms and partly-bombed warehouses

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were crammed with goods of every description awaiting transportation north. The offices were crowded with frantic would-be shippers all screaming their stories at any official they could buttonhole — usually, as I found, the wrong one. Just as one had got hold of someone who, it seemed, might eventually be able to do something, the alarm would sound, and in ten seconds one would be alone in the yards, trying not to become infected with panic.

Little by little order emerged. One day a high railway official gave me his own first-class compartment in which to stow some urgently needed machine parts. Another day I was suddenly rung up and told there was fifteen tons' space available if I could get my cargo over to the station in about two hours. No lorry was to be had, so I loaded the stuff into all the taxis I could find and dashed across the town, only to be told that the space had been requisitioned by the Government at the last moment. Sometimes we did get a whole railway car, which always meant hurried loading and usually at night, but the only reason we ever got one was that the Government helped us when they could. It was the old Kwangsi story over again — no cigarettes, no revenue : so the cigarette-makers must be encouraged and assisted if necessary.

A big proportion of all the railway space certainly was devoted to Government cargoes, notably oil for the war machines. The remainder went, frankly, to the highest bidders. Anybody could get a 40-ton car from Canton to Hankow if he chose to pay "squeeze" to the tune of five thousand dollars in addition to the freight charged. As the months passed and Hankow and other cities of Central China became in a sense under siege, the profits obtainable on commodities shipped to them were more than enough to justify this side-payment. Grafts of this kind are completely characteristic of Chinese public life, but as they are also not unknown in connection with local government in many parts of Europe and America, there is not much to be said about it here. It did, however, seem a pity that the beleaguered people of Hankow should pay more for their commodities to fatten a crooked official in Canton. The public conscience in Britain and America at least makes some attempt to restrict such abuses in war-time.

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In the early months of 1938 we heard that a military road had been completed all the way from Hankow to Canton. A British Intelligence officer — my old friend from Wuchow — had made the journey in a car. The question therefore arose whether it would be possible for the Company to use it. After the consideration due to so weighty a matter it was agreed that one lorry should be bought and fitted out in Hongkong, and shipped to Canton, and that I should accompany it on its maiden voyage. This was very satisfactory. It was definitely something outside my ordinary job : it was a matter of general interest, since other concerns were waiting on the result of our experiment : and not only should I be carrying a load that was urgently needed, but also certain high-placed persons had expressed their doubts of my success. The truck duly arrived, painted newly in a nice shade of black with small Union Jacks on the doors. The idea apparently was that Japanese aircraft would not mistake this black object for a Chinese military vehicle. They might not, but they could hardly fail to see it if they came within twenty miles. We wasted no time in repainting it a decent dun colour. We engaged a driver, highly recommended by a bus company, loaded up, and everything was ready. It was no good studying maps, because nobody could tell us what towns the road went through. At the last moment it was decided that one of the Company's employees who was destined for Hankow should accompany me, so I had some moral support for the difficult days ahead.

I decided to start before dawn. All that night it poured with rain, and six o'clock in the morning found us splashing through the puddles of the dark, deluged city. At seven o'clock, influenced by the driver, I took a wrong turning ; five minutes later we were arrested, and were escorted back to Canton in disgrace. It appeared that we had strayed into a military area and would have to explain ourselves to the appropriate official. On the whole I thought we were lucky to be on our way again by 9.30, exasperated as we were by the delay. This time we made no mistake, and bumped steadily along all day. Once or twice we had to ask the way, and had long debates with a lot of people who thought they knew. The road, fair at first, became gradually rougher. The driver had not fulfilled the promise of his testimonials, and I found

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that though indeed he had been employed by the bus company, he had not been a driver. I had never driven a lorry myself, but was forced to it eventually by the driver's determination to de-celerate when changing down. In the afternoon we started on the newly completed section of the road. It was easy to see why there had never been a road there before. It was an impossible bit of country, and I doubt if the road ran straight for fifty yards anywhere. The surface was of mud, which of course the heavy rains had not improved. As long as we were in the hills, however, the road-bed had been carved out of rock and the surface was slippery but not impassable. On we went through the rain, twisting and turning like a worm on a hook, higher and higher into the hills. Nightfall brought a misty drizzle but no sign of a haven.

We now had to go very slowly, crawling round the interminable hairpins, our lights showing us nothing but the mist in front of us. More than once we had to stop altogether while one of us made a reconnaissance of the next corner on foot. For four hours we struggled through the darkness without seeing a soul, and at last I saw a gleam of light in the valley below. The light proved to come from Muiluk, a filthy little village which nobody had ever heard of before and which I hope I shall never see again. This shows base ingratitude when I consider how glad we were to get there. I found the inn, and was given the only free room — a cupboard under the stairs measuring no more than five and a half feet in any direction, and full of bugs. We ate more hard-boiled eggs, our only food that day, and I retired to my closet, while the rest of the party elected to sleep in the lorry.

I hate getting up very early in the morning, and regard the recurrent necessity to do so as one of the major afflictions of the present war, but I was glad to crawl out of that hovel at the first glimmering of dawn. It was still raining, as it had been all night. We climbed into the lorry and started to drive up the short steep slope to the road. Two hours later, exhausted, drenched and furious, we were precisely where we had started. The wheels had spun many miles through the same mud, our backs ached with pushing. As we were on the point of despair a gang of roadmen appeared, watched our labours amusedly for a while, and finally, when money had

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changed hands, pushed us out on to the road and we were off. All that day we battled through mud, expecting (for some reason) that the top of each hill would bring the end of our troubles : at last we came down into the plain, and drove into Shiukwan before dark.

Shiukwan was a good deal battered and the hotel I had stayed in on my North river trip was no more. I stayed with our dealer, a merchant of good standing and interested in transportation. He always paid me the compliment of talking to me directly in what he imagined was the Northern dialect, but was in fact unlike any language I had ever heard before, and I had an embarrassing time in his society. Next morning the rain had stopped and we set off in better spirits. The first twenty miles were rough going, but comparatively flat, but thereafter we left the river and the railway and began, in the usual serpentine gyrations, to ascend the great barrier that here divides North from South. The railway uses the river as a pathfinder, and I had got no impression from the train of the magnitude of the obstacle. The road, scorning natural aid, climbs right up to the Pass of Nine Precipices — a figure I soon found to be conservative. As we went up, loop after loop, our spirits rose appropriately ; the sun was shining on the fresh earth, of which one could discern an ever-increasing area, and the pleasure inseparable from the ascent of a mountain without personal exertion heightened our enjoyment. I did not worry in the least when I saw a few flecks of white frost on the ground. An occasional puddle of ice did not trouble the lorry at all. When we came to a small settlement I stopped and jumped out to photograph the huge icicles that hung, an inverted *chevaux de frise*, from the wooden roofs. From here we drove suddenly into cloud, and I did begin to wonder — but surely we must soon start to descend. On and on and up and up. The mist thickened, encrusting our hair and nascent beards with heavy crystals. The wheels skidded once in the icy tracks, and again, and finally, at a steep rise with the uncompromising mountain on the one side and an unfenced precipice on the other, the wheels screamed on the ice and the lorry shuddered to a stop.

I did not want to turn back — anyway there was no place where we could turn. I thought uncharitably of the Traffic

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Department of our associated company in Hongkong, who, beguiled by the vernal zephyrs of the South, had decreed that wheel-chains would not be provided. We had, however, a pickaxe, and with it we took turns to dig ruts through the two-inch crust of ice, exposing the good gravel on which the tyres could grip. Often when we had thus excavated for a few yards, the lorry could get up enough speed to carry on for quite a distance, but this was a dangerous proceeding : once the lorry, losing its impetus, began to skid, and stopped, teetering, on the very brink of the abyss. We were nearly three hours on that icy height before we finally skidded into a ditch, on the landward rather than the airward side of the road, and stayed there.

The best of the light had gone and we faced the uninviting prospect of a night on the mountain-side. I went forward to prospect. I was reminded of a fairy story of my youth about a princess whose perverse guardians made her marriage prospects contingent upon a suitor being able (and willing) to ascend a mountain of glass. Visibility was about twenty yards, but I knew I was near the top when, instead of the comfortable wall of rock on one side, I came to a point where there was a sheer drop on both sides. I could not tell the depth of the cliffs, but as I could see only the unfathomable mist below, my imagination provided the fathoms. When I reached the top at last — it was only a quarter of a mile more — I looked over the other side, and shuddered. Even if we hacked our way to the top we could hardly expect to survive long when we started to descend.

I found it, paradoxically, more difficult to go down than up, and bruised myself severely in my return to the car. We began to dig out the embedded wheels, more to keep warm than with any other constructive purpose, and suddenly, when we least expected it, *Deus ex machina*, rescue arrived. Two carloads of Europeans came roaring up the hill, one car with chains clanking on its wheels, towing the other, which had none. They stopped, and sympathised. I was too weary to show much initiative, but soon, like the poor man in the carol, we were treading in our master's footsteps. The chains cracked the ice so much more quickly and effectively than the pick, and soon we were at the top. Even now I shudder when I think of the

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descent. We all slid down in a bunch, keeping the road more by luck than judgement. Mercifully the ice descended only a short distance down the northerly slopes, and presently we were running smoothly down into the darkening valleys.

It was pitch dark when we rumbled past Ping Shek, and snowing hard. Soon a post by the road and a marked steadying in our gait told us we were back on the fine roads of Hunan, in country I knew, and I sighed with relief, feeling, for the first time, that we should probably get there in the end. Admittedly our troubles were not over ; it was hard to keep on the road, indistinguishable from the fields under a foot of snow ; we could see very little and were cold and tired. But it was a joy to arrive at last in Chenchow, to knock up an inn, and find the old Hunanese comfort again. Here I was interpreter for my Cantonese driver, and my shouts soon produced charcoal fires, and hot water, and rich soup, and beds with down quilts over the boards, and lots of piping-hot tea in which to pour stinging tots of whisky. For once, to Arrive was more pleasant than to Travel.

Next day we sped northwards through melting snow. By the time we reached Hengyang, the Chinese Army was much in evidence. Hundreds of vehicles, mostly German diesels, crowded the roads, and there were soldiers everywhere. From here it was only a hundred miles by good straight roads to Changsha, and we covered the distance in about three hours. My old stamping-ground had suffered surprisingly little from bombs, and looked as lively and prosperous as ever. I found a few old friends in Changsha, and was gratified to learn that our manager had just wired Canton to the effect that the roads were impassable and I could not be expected to reach Changsha for several days. A batch of British lighters were leaving shortly for Hankow, so there was no need to drive further. I sent off the appropriate report, and that was that.

I waited in Changsha until the snow had melted, and, travelling in sunshine throughout, had a pleasant and uneventful journey home. The Pass of Nine Precipices seemed formidable enough, but nothing like the dreaded mass it had been under snow. In Shiukwan I stayed a day and there was an alarm in the morning. All the citizens, as one man, trooped off to the hills, but my companions and I cowered in the

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dealer's cellar while the bombs fell. There was an aircraft factory at Shiukwan, directed by an American called Day, well known in flying circles, and I called on his pretty wife that afternoon. I had a great admiration for these people who were cheerfully working under fire, without any protection from their Government, in a world which was not yet reconciled to family life in the front line. The bombers strafed vehicles on the road that day, and as I sped homewards on the fine dry road I passed a series of smouldering hulks by the roadside. The country, touched up by the sun, was lovely, the hills green and covered with trees, so that our struggles of a week before seemed absurd and exaggerated. I got back from my journey with a two-weeks beard and full of news, but Shameen was preparing Amateur Theatricals and was not interested. So I shaved painfully and kept my own counsel : but the Company bought a fleet of trucks which ran up and down the road until both terminals were lost to China. And the Hankow factory turned out cigarettes until twenty-four hours before the Japanese walked into the city.

In their advance up the Yangtse the Japanese more than once fired on British gunboats. The British Ambassador had been strafed and badly wounded by Japanese aircraft long before this. Whatever went on behind the scenes, no public gestures were made sufficient to salve the wounded feelings of the British. The wounded Ambassador went to Turkey, and was replaced by Sir Archibald Kerr Clark Kerr. Some Americans in the Canton Club were unwise enough to make unkind remarks about British weakness. The bombing and sinking of the U.S.S. *Panay* put an end to that argument. We felt all the time that the Japanese were feeling their strength, just as we were being made to feel our weakness. The general opinion was summed up by the Commissioner of Customs : "The Japs used to be damn good fellows — now they are b——s, of course." I could not quite swallow this at the time ; it seemed to me a judgement running *contra* to the accepted biological theory of the leopard, which must presumably be applicable also to less predatory fauna. Only after seeing the changes in Germany and Italy in a few years am I able to agree with the Commissioner.

In Canton civilian morale was bad. Nobody quite trusted

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anybody else. One day there was a fierce air raid, the aircraft flying lower than usual. They were met by an unusually severe barrage and beat a hasty retreat. Afterwards we heard the explanation. The Japanese had approached an old Chinese general living in retirement in Canton (there is always an old general handy on these occasions), and in return for a vast bribe he had agreed to head an organisation which was planning a *coup d'état*. The idea was to murder the Governor of Canton, put the general in his place and then declare for Japan. Japanese air forces would make a demonstration immediately afterwards, and if they were unopposed the army would follow.

One can imagine the general's restrained delight when, in view of his insistence, the envoys agreed to pay his bribe in advance. He showed himself a keen follower of the cause : he even insisted on putting forward the *coup d'état* by a week, on some pretext or other. On the last evening the conspirators met at the general's house to work out the final details ; the extra week would have meant extra strength, but with luck all should go well. The general was full of confidence, and transmitted his enthusiasm to his confederates, and when all was settled for the following dawn, the party broke up with protestations of individual courage and mutual faith. The general bowed his guests out, wandered back to his telephone and asked for the Governor's number. . . . A good many people got shot next morning, and martial law prevailed in the city for a time. The Japanese Air Force got a surprise, the Japanese diplomats a disappointment. The general went back into retirement, not, I suspect, without permitting himself an inscrutable smile — having at one blow filled his coffers, saved his city and outwitted the presumptuous little dwarfs from the Eastern Ocean.

I went to a Chinese dentist who had been educated in America and had an excellent reputation. His results were all right, but certain of his methods would have been more becoming to a sculptor. He had two little Chinese acolytes, and I seemed to have all six hands in my mouth, besides a cold chisel, most of the time. He told me his assistants never stayed with him more than three months. At the end of this unofficial apprenticeship they went off to practise as full-blown dentists

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on their own. This is general in the medical profession in China.

It happened at this time that the Hongkong office had some Customs documents which they did not care to entrust to the mails. A trusted office-boy, who had been with the Company many years, caught the evening Canton train at Kowloon and disappeared. Three weeks passed, and in spite of enquiries on all sides, notifying the Customs and informing the police, we could find out nothing. At last we got a clue: this is what had happened.

The office-boy, Wong, arrived in Canton at nine o'clock in the evening. He was a Foochow man, and did not know Canton well, so was delighted to see Ying, another Fukienese, in the street, and the two went off to have supper and a good talk about old times. Now, Ying had recently discharged a female servant from his house, and as bad luck would have it, this woman saw the two little gentlemen going into the restaurant. With the ready resource of her sex she hailed a policeman and denounced the two as Japanese spies. Their foreign (Fukien) accents were corroboration, if any had been needed, and they were hauled off to gaol "on suspicion". Ying, having resided in Canton for years, got out fairly easily, but the wretched Wong stuck fast. Slowly, without any initiative from Ying, who was apparently too relieved at his own escape to worry about his friend, the story got around, until at last we heard about it. Then began an infuriating period. My *taipan* and I made repeated calls on police officials. One in particular we detested. He was a lean fidgety creature who had the repellent habit of never looking straight at one, always just past one's ear. When we said that Wong was not a spy, he said "how did we know?" The trouble was, of course, that in accordance with its invariable custom the Company could not pay a cent of "squeeze", a state of affairs as peculiar as it was irritating to the authorities. At last, by sheer persistence, we got an order for release, armed with which I drove out to the prison. I did not enjoy this excursion. Most of the prisoners, whatever their age, wore on their faces the hopeless resignation of the very old. It was the first time I had seen men in chains, and heard the clink and shuffle of their passing by. Most were in rags, but Wong appeared at

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last, pathetic in his soiled business suiting, with shackles round his ankles and a boater gallantly sported on his head. He had not been ill-treated, and as he had a little money with him he had been fed, meagrely, for about twice the price he would have paid in a good hotel. His money was running low, and the sudden flash of joy on his face when he saw me come to his rescue would have repaid a lot more trouble.

I tell this story because it is significant of two things. First, it shows a little the spirit which was abroad in Canton in those days, the distrust and suspicion and hate. A government that is sure of itself does not need recourse to the infamous services of informers: the Trojan horse was already at the gates of Canton. Secondly, here was a harmless traveller arrested on the evidence of a palpably unreliable witness; the envelope he carried was addressed to a foreign company and contained documents belonging to the Chinese Maritime Customs, but, though the seals had been broken, no communication had been made either to the Customs or to the Company; what was going to happen to Wong when his money ran out remains obscure. It is evident that the Chinese system of policing and of administering justice is immature, incompetent, corrupt and cruel. Those good people who decry "unequal treaties" and scream for the renunciation of extra-territorial rights (now renounced) would do well to consider the embarrassing adventure of Mr. Wong and the thousands of other adventures that did not have a happy ending.

Towards the end of my time in Canton I was honoured with an invitation to dinner with the Consul-General. Two distinguished ladies were coming — one of them, a journalist, Mrs. H., the wife of a very eminent scholar; the other, Mrs. S., the busy wife of a Hongkong Government official. Mrs. H. had just arrived from India, and was now going to "do" China; Mrs. S. had been on a good-works mission of some kind to Hankow. To meet them the C.G. had invited my *taipan* and his wife, both intelligent and educated people, the Consul (an Etonian) and his American wife, and myself newly returned from Kwangsi, so there was no reason why it should not have been a stimulating and enjoyable evening. As it turned out, it was a social shambles.

Mrs. H. started us all off on the wrong foot. She meant

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to be kind, and prefaced all her remarks by the phrase "Of course I've only been in China five minutes, but *may* I say . . ." Short of cries of No ! she had every discouragement, but continued her say with the dogmatism of a legislator and the conviction of a minor prophet. "The trouble with you people", she began, "is that you don't get close enough to the natives." It was no use my *taipan* mentioning his excursions into Mongolia, or my putting in a word about my recent stay in a sampan. She would have it that we must force our way into that stronghold, the Chinese home, beside which, for exclusiveness, the Englishman's home is a public-house, and inflict our domestic customs on the inmates. Mrs. S. chipped in to say that we should see that all the Chinese should have baths in their houses, and Mrs. H. added that we should jolly well see that they used them. The idea of our insisting on total immersion for our dignified and often immaculate Chinese associates was too much for us "China hands", and amid laughter and cheers the young Consul said, "My dear Mrs. H., you should stay here ten years and then come and talk to us again". Mrs. S., retorted wittily, "Judging by what it does to some people, I hope I shan't be here for ten years". After this of course the gloves were off, and the alternating periods of passionate declamation and teeth-gritted silence were only varied by the C.G.'s frantic assurances that of course there was a lot to be said on both sides. My *taipan*'s wife was inclined to side with the ladies until Mrs. H. turned to her kindly and said, "Of course, my dear, Mrs. S. and I are intellectuals !" which relegation to the outer darkness of the mere physicals so annoyed her that she was quite speechless for some time. I forget which of the intellectuals first introduced the phrase "commercial persons" ; whichever it was, I hope she noticed that it recurred with awful regularity in all the remarks of the opposition for the rest of that horrid evening. The party finally degenerated into icy platitudes and broke up at the unheard-of hour of 10 P.M., leaving the intellectuals convinced that the commercial person in China was even more arrogant, stupid and short-sighted than they had been led to believe.

I suppose Mrs. S.'s life in Hongkong and Mrs. H.'s experience in India had something to do with it. They did not quite realise perhaps that China is not incorporated in the British

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Empire, and that the handful of British people who live, strictly on sufferance, in that country are hardly in a position to take a maternal attitude to its citizens. Mrs. S. had been busy with the admirable work of housing refugees in Hongkong, in which no doubt her Lady Bountiful tendencies had free play. Mrs. H., the Ambassadors from the court of Bloomsburia, had been for many years concerned with the throwing of sops to underdogs, a very habit-forming pastime. So they could hardly be expected to realise that in the case of China it is we who are the underdogs, and that any attempt to impose modern conveniences on this timeless and animated civilisation is presumptuous and futile.

There is a little aftermath to this story. The Mayor of Canton, with an eye to the world's press, invited the two ladies to a big luncheon. It was just after Munich. Mrs. S. got up to "say a few words", and the Chinese reporters poised pencils. She began, "I am an Englishwoman, but I am ashamed of my country : as an Englishwoman I am ashamed to be standing among you Chinese". The pencils remained poised. After it was over, the Mayor went to the only other British guest and apologised for the uncouth behaviour of his guest of honour. Of course, one must get closer to the natives.

After a year we were almost regarding war as a normal condition, which complicated and elaborated, rather than restricted, our business activities. We had plenty of cigarettes in our godowns — the Company's Shanghai factories had resumed their operations while still under fire, and had never faltered as long as materials were available. Our fleet of lorries, though they were a series of headaches to the operators, continued to take vital supplies to Hankow, while occasional railway waggons took the heavier stuff. There seemed no very obvious reason why this state of affairs should not continue indefinitely, provided that the Japanese kept their armies in the North. I was already away on my new job, in September 1938, when news came of the Japanese landings in Bias Bay. There had already been an intensification of bombing, so severe that we had at last removed our office equipment from the centre of the city, where we had kept it for so many months, to premises on Shameen. Now it continued night and day, to "soften" the Chinese resistance. As the Japanese were racing

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inland towards Canton, their Central armies were closing in on Hankow, which finally fell quietly, but Canton went out in a blaze of glory. The Shakee Bund, the row of shops immediately facing the island of Shameen, was deliberately fired, presumably with the intent of involving the foreigners in the conflagration, and thus in the war. The wind blew steadily from the south and kept the flames away. The climax came with the explosion of an ammunition dump at Wongsha station, which broke most of the windows in Shameen and knocked a number of houses off their foundations. I felt a deserter, being safely away in Kwangsi during the death-throes of Canton. The speed of the Japanese advance made war-history. The Chinese resistance was slight, and in those days before the fall of Europe it seemed that there must have been a sell-out. There probably was : it would be nothing new in Chinese, or Cantonese, history. In times of trouble — this is the real tragedy of China — the leaders of the people hoist the time-honoured signal, "*Sauve qui peut*", and the people pay the bill. I was comforted to hear later that the Shameen residents faced the blow in traditional style. When the mighty explosion occurred, at eleven o'clock on Sunday morning, the only Shameen casualty was one of the more robust *taipan*'s wives, who sustained a cut on the lip.

ON THE ROAD (I)

THE colossal Yangtse is the natural windpipe of China, and its closure by the Japanese meant economic death. For a time the Canton-Hankow railway served as it were as a tracheotomy tube through which the great trading country could still struggle for breath. The fall of the two termini simultaneously put a stop to that, and other routes had to be found. My new job was attractive in the extreme to my enquiring mind : I was given a car and a free hand, and instructed to explore the possibilities of transportation to Central and Western China from the remaining open ports on the South Coast. So off I went, picking up the car in Kwangsi, my party consisting of a driver from Peking, a Cantonese servant and a young Chinese called Lin as an interpreter.

I decided to start at the bottom and work upwards. I drove west across Southern Kwangsi, about a hundred miles to Watlam, whence a little road ran south towards the sea. This brought me out, after crossing the coastal strip of Kwangtung, at the Chinese city of Tchekam, adjoining the tiny French colony of Kwangchow-Wan. It was a strange experience to pass out of China abruptly into this little plot of Europe. There was no compromise : for the seven miles of metalled road from the Chinese frontier to the port of Fort Bayard we must drive on the right, as in France, not the left, as in China. Fort Bayard consists of an indifferent harbour, a few streets of neat little foreign houses, a barracks housing the Annamite troops and a very dirty little rest-house in which I stayed one night, and one only. Having obtained the technical information I required, I left the car for repairs and went to the house of the Commissioner of Customs, back again in smelly old China. The Commissioner, like many others in that service, was an excellent fellow and a character. His Customs House and residence were new, and a striking change from the heavy pillared or gothic edifices put up in the early days, being white,

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light and harmonious with their surrounding. The Commissioner was a Scot, and while he welcomed the quiet and very laborious life he had to live, upheld the hardy and sporting traditions of his race. In the rocky land outside his garden he had marked out a golf course, round which on Sunday mornings he was wont to bash a ball, or a series of balls, with two French friends from Fort Bayard. Though not a brilliant golfer he usually won, as the French, whether from lack of skill or from a wish to husband their golf balls, consistently played a dribbling game. In the winter he had organised a private hunt. He possessed a foxhound bitch, and there was one fox in the neighbourhood, so at seven o'clock on Sunday mornings and Customs holidays through the season the fox, hound and huntsman — on foot — met together and took their constitutional. I stayed a week in this house, enjoying myself lazily. I saw something of the French, and was amazed at the completeness with which they brought their atmosphere to their little colony. They had a club, of course — the French always call their clubs "Cercle Sportif", which sounds very much jollier than our staid name — but I found it rather dull. The French hobbies of eating and loving do not go well with excessive drinking, which at least gives animation and conviviality to Anglo-Saxon gatherings. The relations of the French with the Commissioner of Chinese Customs were not always happy. However, his tact and charm inevitably made him friends, there were parties, and the Commissioner himself had a dinner party one day. Wine of course was plentiful and the party was gay, but I noticed that, though the Commissioner's French was weak, his guests made no attempt to speak English. Never let it be said that the British are the world's worst linguists. The French, without the excuse of living in an island, are worse. One of the young ladies was getting married next week. I asked her about her fiancé and she said, "He's a funny little man". Slightly shocked, I asked, rather clumsily, "*Vous ne l'aimez pas?*" To which she replied, "*Pas trop*", and changed the subject. Very French, I said to myself.

I made several attempts to explore the adjoining country in hired cars, but never seemed to get anywhere. I always started off hopefully and travelled an hour or so along reason-

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ably smooth "dirt" roads, but then the rain would come, "tropical", as they say in books "in its intensity", and the car would skid to a standstill. By the time the rain had stopped and we had pushed the car out of a few bogs, it was time to go back. I sighed for the good stone foundations of the highways of Hunan. As soon as my car was ready for the road I chose a fine day and bade the Commissioner farewell. Next time I saw him was when the Government lodged me next door to him in St. Andrews, Fife.

My destination was Pakhoi, a small Treaty Port about a hundred miles west as the crow flies. The country is most attractive, open, little cultivated, sometimes almost moorland, sometimes almost forest. Occasionally we passed Hakka tribeswomen working in fields, a sure sign that the land was no good to anybody else. The Hakkas are one of two aboriginal tribes I know of in China, and like other aboriginals they are unprepossessing and out of luck. One usually finds them at the tops of mountains, and I had seen groups of them near the Pass of Nine Precipices. Their women wear big flat-brimmed hats with blue curtains hanging from the rim. Our encounters with Chinese on the road were unhappy. Twice we got stuck in bogs along deserted stretches of roads where nobody was in sight; twice, as though they sprang from the ground, crowds of muscular Chinese appeared, armed with spades and ropes and poles and other paraphernalia of salvage, and we settled down to bargain with them for the price of our rescue. There were a series of ferries to be crossed too, and at one of them the boatmen took us across and then held us up by refusing to place the gangways aboard to enable us to get ashore. They demanded double the proper fare—which I refused automatically—and sat down out of our reach and lit cigarettes and glared at us balefully. This was the first time I learned to appreciate the absolutely sterling qualities of my interpreter Lin.

The Lins are originally a Fukien family, but my Lin's family had lived for generations in the North-western province of Shensi, where his father was a Government official. He was quite fearless, alike of bombs, petty officials and menacing yokels. He sat down on the running-board of the car and began, as he said, to scold. His language was robust, fluent and extremely derogatory, and he spoke, with only short pauses for

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breath, for three-quarters of an hour, in Cantonese, which he was learning with difficulty, weighted with the bucolic stamp of his strong Northern voice. They were rogues. They were traitors. They were hopelessly deficient in manners, and that in the presence of a foreigner. They had caused a loss of "face" which would shame the whole district for years to come. What was more, they were fools, for the foreigner would doubtless have given them a handsome tip for prompt service, whereas now they had nothing to expect but bare payment, and afterwards they would be reported to the magistrate and probably arrested. From being truculent, Lin's adversaries became sulky, and finally pleading, but their hard-luck stories fell on deaf ears, for we knew we were winning. Sooner or later the bus would come along, and the pontoon would have to be freed; so at last with the worst possible grace they caved in and flung the heavy boards into place, and we went, tardy but triumphant, on our way.

This tendency to opportunism based on other people's difficulties is an unlovable but by no means a rare characteristic of the Chinese. I met a missionary once who, with his wife and baby, were in a tow that struck a rock in a flooded river at night and began to sink. My friends' cabin was quickly filled, but they succeeded in climbing out on to the poop, where they stood in the pouring rain with the other passengers. In no time sampans came out from a near-by village, and stood by, just out of reach, while they bargained with the terrified passengers. Finally all were taken off except my friends, who had lost all their money in the submerged cabin. At the last moment one sampan crew was moved to the qualified charity of agreeing to rescue the family in exchange for the blanket in which, all being in night clothes, they had wrapped the baby. This on a pouring winter night, from a people notoriously fond of children.

This leads me to an even worse story. One Sunday evening some friends of mine came into the Canton Club after a weekend in the country. As they were driving along a highly-banked road, an old woman had tottered out into their way. In swerving to avoid her they went off the road into a rice field, whereupon a band of villagers appeared, taking a very hostile attitude, and only agreed to help rescue the car after the

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travellers had paid an outrageous sum in "compensation"; for it was growing dark, and there was no alternative. Next week, at the same place, the same thing happened to another car, with the difference that the old woman was hit and slightly damaged, but the car stayed on the road. Again the righteously indignant villagers demanded blackmail, but this time other cars were about, and no money changed hands. As the story got around, we learned that this was a regular custom in the village: any old woman who could not otherwise contribute to the community was forced to sacrifice her old bones, if necessary her old and worthless life, in a final bid for cash for the communal chest. And this from a people notoriously respectful of old age!

Pakhoi announced itself in the dusk by a powerful smell of pig. It was quite a pretty little port, but the only times I got a breath of pure air were when I went for a sail in the harbour in a rakish little fishing-boat, and when I lunched with the Commissioner of Customs in his house surrounded by a big jungly garden. Here again I found a character. The elderly Commissioner and his wife, whose sweetness of nature had triumphantly survived the ordeal of deafness, received me with great kindness. They had had, and were having, an uneasy time, for Pakhoi had been bombed and was moreover under the constant threat of the Japanese Navy, yet these two seemed quite content to face the menace together in a fashion that did much credit to their American blood. They told me of their visit to England; they had even attended a course of lectures at Cambridge, and had come away less impressed by the old buildings and the beauty of the Backs than by the respect for truth which they said they felt on all sides. I have never heard a prettier compliment to a University. The Commissioner was such a mild, gentle creature that I supposed it was his retiring nature which had prevented him, with all his seniority, occupying the Residence of a much bigger port than Pakhoi.

Months later I heard a story. In the early years of the Republic the Cantonese were by no means inclined to defer on all points to Peking. They particularly resented the centralisation of Customs revenue, and one Governor of Kwangtung even went so far as to use the Chinese Navy for his own purposes, keeping it steaming up and down the Pearl

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river with cargoes of contraband. There was also a great deal of minor smuggling, and the practice was so smiled upon by the Cantonese authorities that the Customs did not dare to take drastic steps to eliminate it. The smugglers were particularly active in the coastal and delta regions around Macao, Shekki and Kongmoon, and every night some scores of junks crept through the tortuous creeks upon their illicit business.

The Commissioner of Customs at Kongmoon was a man noted for his mildness of manner and patience of temper. He let it be known that as long as the smugglers did not use violence upon the Customs staff, if in the execution of their duty they happened to apprehend a junk, he would make no violent attempt to interfere with the trade at large.

One night a Customs watcher was murdered. When they told the Commissioner he was very sorry, for he was a man to whom violence in any form was abhorrent. In the gentleness of his heart he forgave the smugglers their outrage, which might possibly, he thought, have been an accident; but he did mention that they had better not do it again. Unfortunately for the smugglers, they had never heard of a young man in the Customs service who had been undergoing training at Peking some years before these events. The young American was noted for his mildness of manner and patience under offence, and some of his more truculent colleagues made him a butt for their humorous sallies, but they never provoked him to an angry retort. But one evening when he had dressed for dinner and was just going out, two misguided louts set upon him and tore off the front of his shirt. The mild young man put out his hands and seized his two adversaries by their necks, and rubbed their stupid faces one against the other until there was no skin left on either and blood flowed; and he changed his shirt and went off to his dinner party.

As I say, the smugglers knew nothing of this, and one night another Customs man was killed. This event cast the Commissioner into a profound melancholy. He stretched out his hands and collected all the Customs launches in his area, and even borrowed one or two from his neighbours. He saw to it that they were all armed and had a good supply of ammunition. At dawn the launches appeared among a great fleet of smugglers' junks, and when the Commissioner gave the signal,

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they opened fire, and went on firing every weapon they had until there was no other floating thing to be seen. A hundred and thirty-one junks went to the bottom with their crews ; and the Commissioner returned to his office with a heavy heart and began to write a report. There was great consternation when the tidings reached Canton. Eminent persons were eminently displeased, and the heads of the Customs disclaimed responsibility where they could not deny. They could not restore to life the martyred smugglers — indeed it was many years before smuggling in that region achieved anything like its pristine ascendancy — and they could not take disciplinary action against a Commissioner for doing his duty ; but they could ensure that a man capable of such horribly definite action should never be given the scope which he would have as Commissioner in a big port.

But that is just a story that I happened to hear. I did not much fancy Pakhoi as a main supply point, since it lacked the neutral protection of Kwangchow Wan and seemed liable to bombing or invasion at any moment. So we turned our backs on Pakhoi and the pigs and began to pick our way north-west towards Nanning. The roads were rather good at first, and the numerous ferries well appointed. We passed a series of little towns, none of them of any interest except Lienchow, which was completely surrounded by a high wall and was rather handsome in a green setting. At the Kwangtung-Kwangsi border some officials stopped us and wished to search the car, but Lin barked at them something about " Commissioner of Customs — out of the way ! " and we went through. The road was rough and narrow at the centre stage, and we had a lot of trouble at a broken-down ferry, but eventually we came to the main Nanning-Lungchow road, and I photographed a gorgeous sunset as we crossed the broad waters of the West river at Nanning.

For the sake of completeness, I now covered a lot of territory I had already travelled before on other business. Up at Kweilin a locomotive suddenly appeared towing a passenger train. Enquiries by the surprised people of Kweilin discovered the fact that the train had come from Hengyang, one hundred miles south of Changsha, on the Canton-Hankow railway. The engine-driver was quite prepared to go on to Nanning

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and even Indo-China, but as there was nothing but a road-bed, with no sleepers or rails or bridges across the culverts, he had to turn back. This new railway had been under construction for over a year, and I was used to coming round a corner in the car at almost any point in Kwangsi and finding a lot of "Men at Work", clearing away obstructions and patting down the mud. The railway was "projected" from Kweilin deviously to Nanning, thence to Ching Nam Kwan on the Indo-China border. This would provide China with another much-needed outlet to the sea through a neutral port, but the French, who financed part of the construction between Nanning and their border, refused to allow the metals to be laid until the road-bed had been allowed to subside for two full years, and I doubt if it was ever completed. France fell before the period was up. The completion of the northern leg was of course important news for me. It meant that we could send cargoes by British steamer to Wuchow, by junk or sampan, according to the water-level, up to Kweilin, and thence by rail to Changsha. From Changsha shallow-draft lighters were running regularly to Chungking. Of course this depended on the West river remaining open, which it did not for long after the fall of Canton, so I had to start working on Kwangchow-Wan as my port, and working out details and comparing costs for the journey northwards. There was a water route on which rafts were used here, a disused road there; it was my job to find means of transport other than lorry wherever possible, as to the high cost of petrol and limited scope of lorry transport was added the further disadvantage of heavy road tolls. I even investigated the amount a man could carry on his back, on a barrow and on a bicycle. All this meant a lot of work and a lot of moving about, and it was two or three weeks before I was ready to go to Hanoi.

I had as my companion on this journey a tall and handsome youth belonging to the A.P.C., who had spent several months in the interior without a break, and we both looked forward with enthusiasm to our holiday among the civilised French. From Nanning we drove first to Lungchow, a road I knew already, and visited again the polite but distant French Consul. The Consul's "No. 1 boy" had worked many years for a representative of my company, and he had welcomed me and

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John and had us installed in the spare room before the Consul had invited us to dinner, let alone to stay the night. The road to the frontier from Lungchow (which by the way is a dirty and depressed little town partly populated by immigrant Annamites) is rough and was at this time heavily used by lorries, both in transit and working on the railway, which did not improve its surface. So we were not sorry to reach the Chinese Customs point, where our baggage was cursorily examined, and then the Chinese frontier post — where we did not stop. The frontier is defended, like the Northern frontier, by a wall, but with what a difference! Instead of the great barrier of the Emperor winding forbiddingly over hundreds of miles of mountain and valley, the South Wall is a very tame little affair, consisting of one towered gateway with no gate and a meagre rampart that climbs both sides of the valley and finishes at the top. I believe in ancient times there were bloody battles between Chinese and Annamites, but there is no monument of these times in the scenery, or in the peace-loving ways of modern China or the slothful degeneracy of modern Annam and Tonkin.

At the French frontier post we were held up because M. le Délégue was having his siesta, as was his wont between the hours of 11 A.M. and 3 P.M., much to our annoyance, impatient as we were for our night-out in the big city. When we eventually got on our way we ran into unforeseen trouble. My Pekingese chauffeur was a steady enough driver as a rule, but he had long been accustomed to regulate his speed by the surface rather than the direction of the road. In Kwangsi, if the road was good one went at 30 m.p.h.; if it was bad, one went at 10 m.p.h.: but the glassy macadam of the French Colonial road was too much for him, and he went faster and faster. The legend "*Rivages Nombreux*" of course meant nothing to him and it was not long before he struck a car coming too fast in the opposite direction — luckily only a glancing blow, doing no serious damage. After this I drove myself while John gave me a running commentary on the scenery and the population — especially, I fear, its feminine portion. Langson, the first town we came to, was not impressive, though at that time it was a frequent resort of transportation people. It was at the head, or virtually the head, of the

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railway from Hanoi, and the oil people were taking their products from here by truck into Chinese territory and then, in small boats, downstream to Lungchow and on to Nanning. For a time the road ran dead straight alongside the railway across a very fertile plain, over which the blue-green of the young rice spread like an ocean. Later we came to more hilly country, with spectacular cliffs and wooded hillsides, but after twenty miles or so we were in the plain again right down to Hanoi.

The people of Indo-China are smaller than the Chinese and rounder and browner and much, much lazier. They wear conical hats and enormous flat hats, and more voluminous and colourful clothes than the Chinese, and they carry things on their heads, which the Chinese do not, preferring a sprung pole over their shoulder. Their faces, on the whole, are more akin to European faces than Chinese, and some of the girls had lovely eyes; most of them had horrible teeth, blackened with betel nut. They move, undoubtedly, with a languorous grace, to which, say, a vase on the head and flowing robes make a contribution: but I felt their greatest artistic asset was their laziness. The relations between elegance and sloth, unseemliness and bustle, are factors in the shape of civilisation not only in the East but elsewhere in the world.

As we went on the towns grew bigger. We passed barracks of Annamite soldiers, and saw, with a P. C. Wren thrill, members of the Foreign Legion taking their ease. In every village we saw a school, and marvelled at the courage of the early French teachers who imposed an alphabet on a whole people. The Annamites from time immemorial used characters of the Chinese type, but the French have converted their utterances to sounds expressible in Roman script. I never learned a word of the language, but the inscriptions on the street signs were full of "Pnam", "Phoc" and "Phongh". Long dreary suburbs in failing light told us we were approaching Hanoi and we struck, not for the first time, the problem of asking the way "once you get there". It was easy enough along the road to point enquiringly and say "Hanoi?" but obviously once we were in the suburbs the question was received with either blankness or assent. Only a small area of this great city is occupied by Europeans; luckily the Consul had given us

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the name of the best hotel, the Metropole, and though the Annamites called it something else, we eventually arrived. The Hotel Metropole was undergoing, if not enjoying, a boom at this time. Haiphong, that seedy little port, had become all of a sudden, upon the fall of Canton, the main gateway of Free China, and Hanoi was the terminus of the railway as well as of the air line to Yunnanfu and Chungking. So there was quite a cosmopolitan crowd in the hotel, awaiting transport for themselves or their goods, and their loud cries of mutual recognition and their awkward requests at the desk at all hours sorely tried the patience of the manager and his staff. Of course the hotel was making vast sums of money every day out of the new business, but the management continued to look on us as vulgar intruders and relations between staff and guests did not run as smoothly as they might. The regular French customers contrived, by an obvious effort, never to see us at all.

John and I, after the delight of a hot bath and the fortification of a bottle of champagne each, went out to "see the town". "The town" as we saw it consisted of quiet streets and empty cafés — the French, it seems, stay at home after dinner — and a series of second- and third-rate cabarets. At some one could dance with Filipino or Chinese taxi-girls — here John had a pull, as he spoke some Cantonese. At others there were tiny Annamite girls, where my knowledge of French was offset by the discrepancy between my stature and that of my partners; both John and I are well over six feet and the girls seldom exceeded four. At the more posh resorts we could not dance with anybody at all, but there was always the bar, and at one of these we ran into François, the charming French artist I had met, with his English brother-in-law, by the North river and in Hongkong. François, who was doing his military service in Indo-China, showed us more of the things there were to be seen and done, and from our heads next morning we were able to conclude that we had not wasted our evening.

It was not my immediate duty to go into details of shipping arrangements at this end, but by association with others, less fortunate, who were seeking for "space", I soon discovered that for corruption, evasiveness, double dealing and incompetence the French authorities had the Chinese railway officials at Canton beaten to a frazzle. One could have excused

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the graft — the French had built the railway at considerable risk, and they were entitled to make money on it, especially now that they had for the moment a monopoly ; what was so distressing was that they did not even run it efficiently. Nobody wanted to exert himself ; the sacred siesta continued to occupy its three hours ; minor mishaps held up trains for ridiculous periods — later when I travelled on the line all traffic was held up for twenty-four hours by the breaking of one bogie only a mile from a station. Meanwhile the wharves at Haiphong were piling up ever higher with goods vitally needed by China, and a thousand lorries, mobile or boxed, stood uselessly in the streets.

One day we were taken by some friends of François on an expedition to hunt the tiger. We set out in three cars and debouched into *le jungle* about a hundred miles north-east of Hanoi. The jungle did not look very convincing to me, but I was assured that tigers abounded — a fact which caused me only moderate pleasure when I surveyed the party's resources in armament and experience. We were a motley crowd : François, three stalwart young Frenchmen, a Eurasian enthusiast all dressed up for *le sport*, a small boy, John and myself. The armament was assorted. There was a real sporting rifle or two and a couple of shot-guns, and a .22 rifle and an automatic pistol ; also, an optimist had brought an enormous knife with which he proposed to skin and dismember our victims. We decided to have lunch before beginning *la chasse* and I was treated to a choice example of French Imperial manners. As we drove through the country lanes, the rural *indigènes* made obeisance to the Foreign Lords. This gratified my hosts, who explained that in the good old days, before the natives flocked to the towns and became corrupted, the obeisance was universal practice. For lunch we selected a temple, whence a couple of worshippers hastily retreated. The meal, which was extensive and messy, we spread on the altar, which made a handy table ; the refuse and litter remained behind as a memorial of our honourable visitation. Somebody decided to take a little pistol practice, and a target was chalked up on the temple wall. The result proved that the practice was not unnecessary, but there was not much plaster left on the wall when we had finished. It was not my place to

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comment, but both John and I were struck by the change, after China, where one would behave very differently. Of course, here we were in an Empire ; the French ruled this land with considerable firmness, and any tendency to coalescence among the natives was ruthlessly stamped upon. The soldiers beat and kicked the natives in the street, if they were so disposed, without much fear of the consequences. Frenchmen were not officially allowed to execute summary punishment upon their Annamite servants, but I gathered it was done, even on occasion as far as death. The natives retaliated by pandering to their masters' vices, a warfare which has overthrown empires before.

Having eaten and drunk, we each seized a weapon and plunged into the forest, not together or in a line but independently and haphazard, and I soon found myself with François out of sight of the other hunters. But not out of range. Twice we heard a bang and projectiles tore through the foliage round our heads ; these fusillades were followed after a few seconds by cries of mortification from the originators and howls of rage from the near-victims. So the stalk went on. I raised my gun at a bird which looked like a partridge, but paused, disconcerted, when it flew into a bush and began to whistle. A tense "*Tirez, tirez*" from François recalled me to my duty, and I shot it down. François bagged a lizard at short range with his .22. After much powder had been spent, and when the tigers, if any, were putting another ten miles between themselves and us, we adjourned for tea. I was relieved to find everybody alive, and received an ovation for my contribution to the bag, which dear, kind François swore I had shot on the wing. Someone had killed a pigeon, and the Eurasian had a damaged magpie, which, John said, he was taking home to torture. That was the lot until François tried his rifle to see if it was loaded. It was, and a mournful hiss proclaimed that a tyre had been added to the victims. My comrades were by no means discouraged by their failure to slay a tiger, and announced their intention of continuing the hunt in darkness, but I thought the mutual cross-fire would be deadly enough without any British contribution, and took John home. I heard afterwards, amazingly, that none failed to return.

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I had learned enough about Indo-China for my purposes, and my brief acquaintance with the railway authorities had impressed me with the valuable potentialities of wheelbarrow transport *ex Pakhoi*. I spent a final day at the Metropole, and cannot resist repeating a conversation held one morning in the lounge. The very delicate will do well to skip the next paragraph.

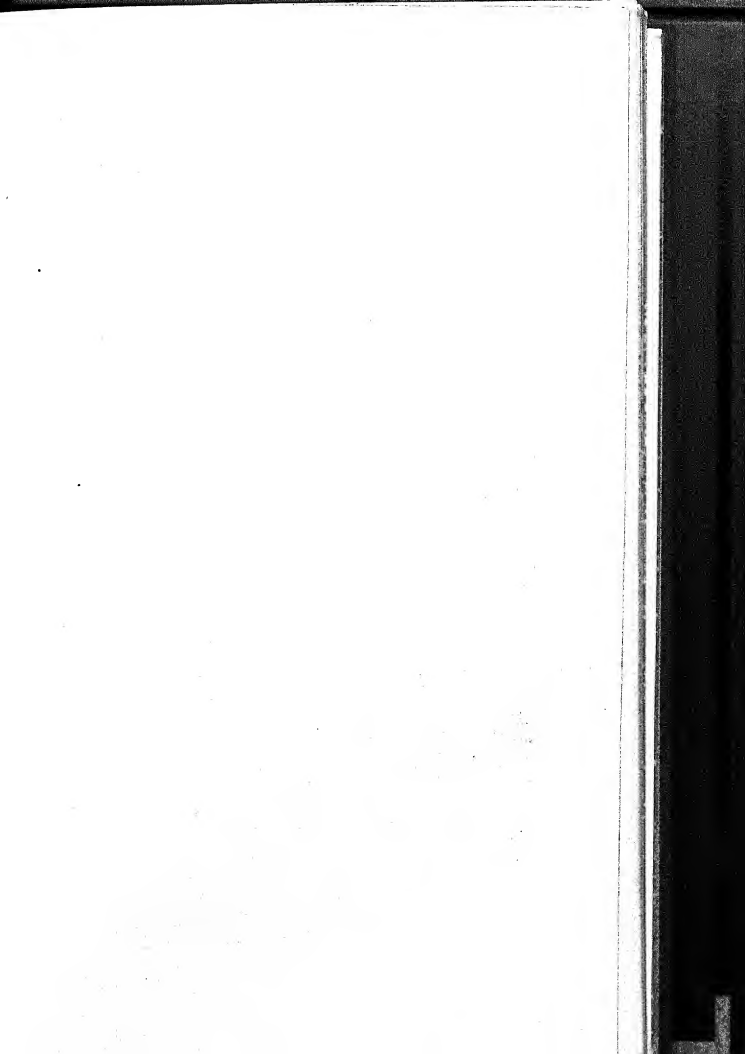
It must be stated that, like most Continental hotels, the Metropole had its bedrooms fitted with that useful article, sadly under-appreciated by Anglo-Saxons, the *bidet*. My scene then is the lounge at "eleven o'clock", a long table at which some fifteen assorted foreigners, with a preponderance of American aviators and their wives, were sipping coffee or *bock*. One very small American, with fair wispy hair and rimless pince-nez, had newly arrived. He was a Government official, devastatingly pitchforked from a two-year Commission on Whaling in Washington to a job in the U.S. Embassy at Chungking. He leaned forward, blinked, and in his polite little voice said, "Say, do any of you fellows know are there any w.c.s in this hotel?" Somebody said they were at the end of the corridors. "Gee," said the little man, "as soon as I saw those little taps I knoo I'd made a mistake!" When the hearty laughter was subsiding, a young American wife, whether from tact or ignorance, who knows? completed the jest by saying, "For crying out loud, he's gorn and used the foot-bawth."

I was not sorry to leave the jaded atmosphere, both in the sexual and the commercial spheres, of Hanoi, though I had a fond farewell to say to John, who was remaining in Indo-China for a time. I went back to Wuchow for a few days to gather up the threads and make my report. I considered that Liuchow, in Central Kwangsi, was a point where all the routes converged, and worked out my transport schemes as far as that point. I had brought some golf balls back with me, but they were never smitten; I found Wuchow in something of a panic, with the golf course taken over by the military, foreign women evacuated again, and the Chinese Customs staff largely in flight. The two foreigners of course remained. In Wuchow I also met my old friend of the Salt Gabelle, who had made the disastrous comparison between the State lottery and the dangers of bombing. He had made a hairbreadth and hair-

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raising escape from Canton with his staff and records, being bombed and strafed all round the Delta, and gave me first-hand news of Canton's fall.

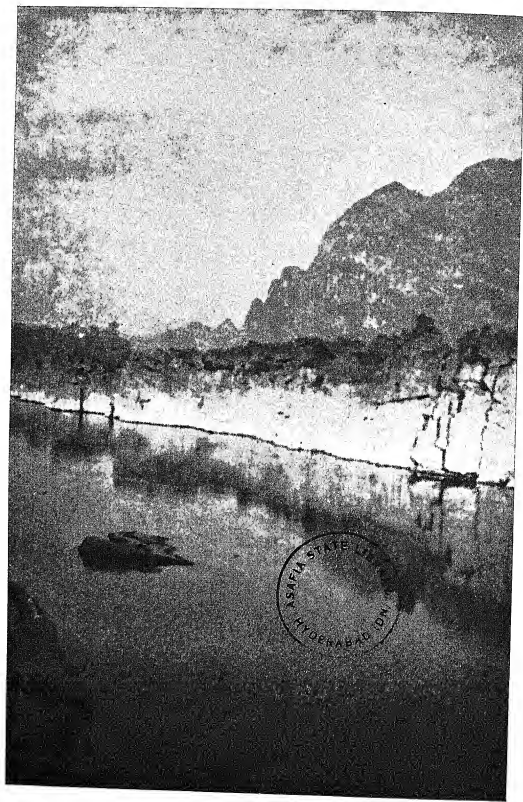
I had a last party with my hospitable friends, packed as much as I could carry in the old Ford, and turning my back on South China where I had spent such a highly-coloured and eventful seventeen months, I bumped off along the road that led to the North.



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SUNRISE AT HINGYUEN

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ON THE ROAD (2)

I DID not dally in Liuchow, now sadly smashed by bombs, but took the road leading north-west, straight towards the heart of China. The road was one of the roughest I had yet encountered, and we made poor time, but arrived at the town of Hingyuen before nightfall. Lin and I spent the evening in a theatre. Many people have described Chinese drama, some seriously, some frivolously, and either way it is a good subject. One evening's entertainment seemed to embrace the whole history of drama, comprising one play in the classical style, heavy stuff with marching troops and bearded generals, tremendously punctuated by the powerful percussion element in the orchestra ; one play in more *piano*, more elegant vein, such as was used as a vehicle by the great Mei Lan Fang, with the chief rôle, of a princess disguised as a general, sung in falsetto by the leading actor ; finally, a crashing domestic comedy in the Plautine vein, in which the rich man was repeatedly and ingeniously cuckolded by the poor scholar, traditionally a home-breaker, I regret to say, in Chinese plays. I was up at dawn next day, goodness knows why, and strolled down to the river, and was for once rewarded for this display of energy. Not only was the sky splashed with rosy fingers, but the early light gave the rocky river-banks a quite unearthly eggshell colouring, which I was able to photograph with the little camera I always carried, illegally, in the pocket of my trousers. To complete the Chinese painting, an old man was fishing on the opposite bank with a long, light rod and line. As I watched he hooked a good fish, and his cries of delight and excitement as he played it would have gladdened the heart of any angler in the world.

The road grew steadily worse, and after we had bumped along for ten miles we made the horrifying discovery that all but two of the leaves of the transverse rear spring had broken. I was carrying, by some fluke of foresight, a spare spring, but

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we had not with us the necessary tools to fit it. For the rest of that day's journey I was on the proverbial tenterhooks. Every bump sent a cold shiver down my spine, as I unwillingly strained my ears for the sharp crack which would announce our ruin. To add to my worries I found we were in one of the most deserted areas of all China, high rugged land, between desert and jungle, no use to anybody, and we saw no other vehicles. At one point there was a long row of hills, bare outcrops of rock, with the strata running horizontally so that they looked like ruined, man-made Pyramids, yet older than the human race. We ran over the tail of a python, a good fifteen feet long, and its passionate writhings, the silent flickering of that furious tail, turned my stomach so that in my seat I shied like a horse. When night fell we were still feeling our way gingerly over the unfriendly hills: but to cut short a story which seemed very long at the time, the good steel held and we came at last to a dark town where we unearthed the manager of the bus station and, with a combination of bribery and cajolery, got him to undertake the job of changing the spring forthwith. Our driver worked all night and tomorrow we were on our way again with lighter hearts.

We were in Kweichow now, a backward, out-of-the-way, undeveloped province. Nobody ever bothered about Kweichow very much. The land is consistently mountainous and barren, so uninviting that much of it has been left to the Miaos, who are another of the aboriginal tribes of China. High up on the hillsides one could see their wretched huts, and fields of stunted corn hacked desperately out of the rock. In the valleys corn was the main crop. Kweichow had lived for years on the poppies which were exported far and wide for the opium pipes of China, but recent reforms had almost eliminated this industry, and alternative crops had not made much progress. An area almost equal to France was supporting a population of only five or six millions, and of those very few were men of any substance. Poor communications had assisted Nature's poverty in keeping Kweichow out of the main line of progress. The roads on which I was travelling had been built only after my arrival in China; before, the only way to get from Kweiyang to the outer world was to walk, for there is hardly a stream in all Kweichow capable of floating a canoe.

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We climbed steadily up towards the centre of the province. Presently we joined the east-west main road, linking Yunnan with Changsha, and here we began to see more traffic and to remember the war. Kweiyang was a surprisingly big city, after the unpromising terrain we had covered. Many vehicles rumbled through its wide cobbled thoroughfare, and new banks and hotels added a garish distinction to its general air of ancient, squalid repose. The streets were grossly crowded, but not with citizens of Kweichow. The great illusion had laid its baneful blessing on Kweiyang. Refugees were arriving every day by the thousand, and it was a sad thing to see the hotels, already full to bursting, besieged by scores of wretched travellers, men, women and children, sitting on their paltry baggage in the freezing rain, asking, pleading, in return for all the money they could scrape together, not for a corner in a room but just a bit of roof to sleep under during the merciless rigours of the winter night. I am afraid I am enough of a snob to be more affected by seeing well-dressed people reduced to destitution than by contemplating the daily afflictions of the chronically poor. Kweiyang, besides being the unkind asylum of countless war refugees, harboured an overflow of Government Departments from Chungking, and also, surprisingly when one considered that the nearest battle-front was several hundred miles away, a great number of prosperous-looking foreigners and Chinese who were paid by Chinese and International Red Cross Associations. These people seemed to put in a lot of hard work attending conferences and luncheons, and I had in Kweiyang the privilege of seeing something I had waited for for years. Two foreigners, rising to bid one another farewell after one of these luncheons, instead of shaking hands decided to be all Chinese and bow. They misjudged their distance and bowed low and simultaneously, and the impact of their imposing crania rang through the restaurant like a gong. I may have got a gravely wrong impression of the Red Cross workers, of whom some, perhaps many, conducted themselves with great courage and devotion. I simply put it on record that I did not happen to meet them, with one honourable exception, near the front lines ; and I felt a strong sympathy for a kindly Mission doctor at Anshun, west of Kweiyang, who said he could endure paying five times the proper price for drugs, but rather disliked, on

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opening a package thus bought, to find it bear the legend "A gift from the Lord Mayor of London".

But I digress. Kweiyang, as I say, was crowded. A room was found for me in the capacious house of our dealer, Wang Hui Ming, who was a genial and villainous opium smuggler with the bland, innocent face of a choir-boy. His house was already filled with the families of his relations and of other members of our staff, evacuated from dangerous areas — out of the frying-pan, as it was to prove later. I had the dirtiest and the most welcome hot bath of my life at one of the hotels, for I had no overcoat and it was cruelly cold. The attendant washed me all over as I had not been washed for a good many years. The dealer gave us a very fine party. Kweichow is famous for its wine, called Mao Tai, which is housed in stone bottles — possibly because no glass will contain it. It is doubly-distilled corn spirit, is very fiery and has a bouquet like sulphuretted hydrogen. I found it impossible to drink it in moderation, but after the first half-dozen Gambeis I ceased to worry about my overcoat. Food in general was only moderate, though costly. Most of the immigrants were rice-eaters, and Kweichow grows no rice, and the price — four dollars a picul in Hunan — was seventy-five dollars a picul in Kweiyang. After dinner I went and paid my respects to the British Ambassador, who was staying in the town. He had just come from Changsha, which had been burned to the ground and was expected to fall to the Japanese at any moment. In spite of indifferent health, Sir Archibald insisted on being on hand when anything was going on, and on travelling as the Chinese would, by road rather than air, so that he might see more of the country to which he was accredited. The Japanese in Hunan sounded uncomfortably successful, and I began to wonder if China could lose the war.

I walked around Kweiyang, seeing that spurious prosperity of shops selling at high prices goods they cannot replace, and hotels full of people who, when their money runs out, will be turned out into the street in favour of others who will eventually go the same way. A few kilted, brown Miao tribesmen and women came in to sell their produce, looking with wonder at the unwonted bustle, to depart, probably, ignorant of its cause, because nobody could understand their language. Sometimes

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at street corners I saw beefy sergeants expatiating on the war to crowds of wondering potential recruits, potential fighters, as good Chinese always are, only if they happened to be destitute. High officers rattled through in staff cars. The rain continued to fall in sheets from a black sky that was Kweiyang's shield against the menace from above. Our cigarettes were scarce already, and fetching fancy prices. I asked a lot of questions about transport, with little satisfaction, for lorries mean petrol, and more lorries to carry it. I had to go to the black market to find fuel even for my car. When I had learned all I could, I set out again, always pushing north.

During the first day's journey the road was very rough but seemed to be old, and in spite of the rain which continued to fall, the solid, uneven flagstones gave me confidence in our eventual arrival. The going was uneventful, plenty of steep turns but nothing spectacular. I had lunch, with our dealer of course, at Tsunyi, a dull little town but enjoying also a refugee boom. As we went on we still seemed to be climbing, but made a reasonable speed, and put up for the night at a respectable inn erected by the Government for distinguished travellers (if any), and all I can remember is sitting by a window overlooking nothing but rain, and writing up my diary, which I lost two weeks later. Presently they told me the Chief of Police had arrived, and I began to wonder what infuriating formalities were to be executed, what difficulties to be put in our way. But the Chief of Police merely brought a message from the magistrate to apologise for not calling on me himself, and to express the hope that I had everything I required! I could not understand this until the next day, when at a military post the men fell in at the double and presented arms, under the impression that I was the returning Ambassador — but perhaps I did the magistrate an injustice, perhaps he was just a very nice man after all.

Anyway it was a pleasant experience and I still felt elated next day as we continued our climb. By ten o'clock I reached the top, and simultaneously the sun came out and we had a glorious northward vista into the mighty province of Szechwan as we looked down a long wooded gorge with line upon line of hills still lying across my path. We plunged spirally down over smoother roads, and came presently to a stream flowing

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north, flowing faster than we could travel, swelling almost visibly with every mile till it tumbled into the Yangtse. Here already water was not being wasted ; tall logs were being felled into the stream, guided through the narrows where they tended to jam by Chinese lumberjacks, later to be bound together in rafts, then in bigger rafts, perhaps eventually to form parts of the floating villages that swing with dignity down the lower Yangtse right to Shanghai and the sea.

The first town we came to brought back to me in a rush memories of the real China that I had almost forgotten. It was only a little town, but it was market day and the streets were thronged, not with jumped-up officials or harassed refugees but sturdy, blue-clad, turbaned farmers, who looked up only for a moment from their chaffering and appraising and joking and discussing to let the car crawl by. The old smell of energy and humanity was there : I no longer thought of China losing the war ; I began to feel strangely excited, and the feeling did not leave me till I left Szechwan. The good Lin also seemed to expand and awaken, and began to tell me stories of his own family life. One of them I thought so charming that I cannot resist repeating it now.

Lin's father was a high official in the Provincial Government of Shensi, and his uncle was a famous scholar and poet. Every Saturday night it was the custom for Lin and his eleven "brothers" (perhaps some were cousins) to gather together and receive from their uncle instruction in the gentle accomplishment of writing poetry. After some years, as the boys grew older, they reached a phase wherein they could think of more stimulating ways of spending their Saturday nights — as no doubt young gentlemen have felt in China for many centuries : nor is it a sentiment we Westerners are in a position to condemn. Of course it was out of the question to play truant, or even to think of running counter to the condescending wishes of an elderly uncle, least of all of one so distinguished. One evening Uncle announced that he would make a test of his pupils, both of their accomplishment and of their taste ; each pupil, as well as the professor, should write a poem, and to ensure fair play Little Sister should read them out in turn, without disclosing the authors ; thereupon the assembly should indicate which poem had the most merit.

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Now my young Lin did a very naughty thing. His knowledge of human sycophancy was as great as his proper respect for his elders was small ; and his poem was a delicate lament on the follies of youth contrasted with the serene beauty of old age. Of course the wily audience immediately " spotted " this effort as Uncle's own, and it was awarded the first prize by popular acclaim. At this Uncle flew into a rage : he bitterly upbraided the feckless band on which he had wasted his tender attentions for so many fruitless years, and swore he would have no more of them. The boys bore their shame with a good grace, but on future Saturdays they were free to sample the less edifying pleasures of the city of Tungkuan.

As we went on down, I noticed an increasing number of strings of pack-horses and mules on the road, and, being transport-minded, paid them a good deal of attention. Sometimes they streamed along the main road, but often they branched off up the hills where the gradient of the old road was too severe for motor traffic. Nor did I neglect the oldest pack animals in the world ; the men who tottered over the cruel hills with enormous weights on their backs. They were tough, hardy men — they had to be — and their eyes had the innocent unfocussed regard of beasts of burden. I am often touched by the docility of the very strong — seeing for example a tiny Chinese Mowgli on the back of a gargantuan buffalo, guiding him home — and wondered whether there were here latent fires which would one day break out in some final Wellsian cataclysm. Many of the south-bound porters were carrying salt, in the form of great lumps of rock, on their shoulders, and in my ignorance I wondered how such a cheap commodity could stand the cost of manhandling for hundreds of miles. I know now that what we are apt to regard as a mere relish, to be flicked over our food with the tip of a knife, is a vital necessity to peoples whose diet does not supply it from other sources. I was later to see for myself how, for those who live exclusively on corn or rice, complete lack of salt means not inconvenience or even dyspepsia, but a revolting and comparatively speedy death. The blockade had eliminated supplies of panned salt from the coast, so the old quarries in remote corners of China had been reopened and an ancient industry restored.

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We passed a series of ferries of gradually increasing width, and at one of them, a pontoon dragged across by a chain, the operators sang a curious, rhythmical chant, with a chorus in harmony and a soloist, new to me, for most Chinese music relies on the intricacy of a falsetto melody without accompaniment. I had heard the songs, half music and half recitation, of porters at Hankow and Shanghai, but in Szechwan all the water-folk sang. Only the poor porters plodding over the mountains had not enough breath or spirit to sustain their dragging footsteps with music. Journey's end came abruptly. A few houses, a thickening of the traffic, and suddenly we came round the last corner to the very banks of the Yangtse.

I had always felt overawed by the Yangtse Kiang, and never more so than now. From Chungking to the sea by river is seventeen hundred miles, yet here before me was still a mighty flood. It was the low-water season, yet even now the water was, I suppose, between a quarter and half a mile wide, and flowed so fast that no big fish, at least of the leisurely carp family, could live in it, and certainly no big ones were ever caught. It took half an hour to cross by sampan, and that with a loss of a mile, so that the boats had to be dragged upstream along the opposite bank for the return trip while the passengers proceeded more rapidly on foot. On the south bank were numerous villas and mansions, mostly in foreign styles, housing the greater part of the foreign business community and some of the embassies, and this is where I stayed, with the towering Chinese city, sometimes visible, sometimes hidden by fog, but always audible, facing me across the shining firth.

In the river below me were a few foreign gunboats, and the small, over-powered foreign steamers that used to brave the awful gorges between Chungking and Hankow; but the foreigners never seemed so insignificant, such cheeky yet negligible intruders as at Chungking. The geographical perspective was only part of the explanation. The valley is high and steep, descending from many hundreds of feet with increasing abruptness until the last stretch to the river is almost a cliff. When I went to dinner with my old friend Tommy of the American Embassy, I climbed up for an hour, or was

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carried by a chair with four strong bearers, taking with me my night-clothes and an extra jersey for the cold, and still we were not at the top. Over on the north bank the city was all terraces, up and up and up, a city in two dimensions, like a photographic group. On both sides the main north-south streets consisted exclusively of steps. When the bosses arrived in their launches in the morning, they might have only a hundred yards to go to their offices, but a chair would be awaiting them, for the hundred yards would be vertical, not horizontal, the steps slippery and crowded and exceedingly steep. And it was a city of two million inhabitants ; no wonder the foreign steamers looked small.

But it was not only the magnitude which overpowered us, it was also the intensity. Here I felt the quintessence of China, as if all the cities of the river and the plains were rolled into one, and if Chungking was the capital at last, it seemed fitting that it should be so. The compromise with the West which I had remarked in Canton had no place here. There were more Chinese here than anywhere else ; they seemed to work harder, to talk louder ; they were " more so ", and instead of laughing with the foreigners they openly laughed at us, so that we hastily grinned to give the impression that we were sharing the joke, to save our puny faces. Like ants, like bees, like fleas in a sieve — one needs to be a poet, as I am not, to describe the seething activity. If one looked along the streets one saw the land - China, going and coming, buying and selling and living, without rest and without end. If one looked out across the water one saw river - China, a slim junk spinning by, rowed by eight oars at the forward end, plied by eight boatmen facing forward on their feet and singing a merry brisk song, far different from the dirge of the trackers dragging the same boat upstream another day, with a long rope from one mast-head to their taut shoulders. As they strove upward inch by inch, their mournful voices raised less in a chant than a musical groan, I thought of figures in a Dantesque hell, — yet in a way it was China's cry of triumph. The river is merciless but they get there in the end, in spite of it and because of it.

Immediately I felt the clutching hand of China reaching for my soul like *La Belle Dame sans Merci*. It seemed so futile to be in such a community and not " of " it ; I was like a man

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gazing fascinated into a whirlpool, and with an effort I clutched at my friends and dragged my eyes away. I was not the only one to feel thus threatened, and it must not be thought that foreigners were meeting this assault quite passively. There was of course the club, on the south bank, and the river to serve them as a moat, defensive to a house. A standard means of travel up and down the staircase streets of Chungking is, incredibly, on horseback, and the Szechwan ponies trip down the devilish steps without turning a hair, so the foreigners go riding on Sunday mornings and even organise paper-hunts on this murderous terrain. But there was beginning to be division in the ranks, not yet wide, but deep. Richard, my great friend of the German Consulate in Canton, was here Chargé d'Affaires, and when I had lunch with him he said that Tommy, once the third party at our endless nocturnal debates, was rather stand-offish these days. Tommy said that Richard was a good fellow but "rather the Ambassador now, you know", and they seldom met any more. The absence of most of the women, the shortage of Western amenities and the feeling in some of us of alliance with the Chinese in a common struggle, all weakened the corporate resistance of the West to the East. I felt that "unequal treaties" would never have been imposed on China if Chungking had been the capital, and that nobody could stand up against her here for long. I could only admire and wonder at the men who had brought the foreign chattels here in the beginning; perhaps the very magnitude of the task produced a courage to meet it that verged on madness.

I spent a week in Chungking, renewing old friendships and interviewing transportation companies, finding out to a penny what it would cost to bring our cigarettes from Kweiyang, and comparing the virtues of porters, horses and vehicles on the route. My host was, I believe, a Turk by descent, very much a European, and a gourmet of distinction, which was not a very good thing to be in face of the peptic rigours of the wartime capital. His newly-wedded wife had come to him direct from Paris, losing on the way the whole of her trousseau, which was of course irreplaceable. They were a kind and brave couple, and made the best of things. They told me a little story which illustrates the logical methods of a Chinese cook. Recently they had entertained a guest for a week, at the end

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of which the cook presented double the usual bill for sugar served in tea, coffee, etc. It was not easy to explain to the cook that the guest had been a diabetic ! I left on a Saturday morning, and as I looked for the last time over the foggy river, I caught a glimpse of two black sampans speeding downstream, each with a large flag on the stern with a familiar symbol, like war canoes off on the prowl. It was the German Embassy staff on its way to work.

Back to Kweiyang, without event — somehow these roads always seemed less formidable on the return journey. Kweichow was covered in cloud as usual, and I was not disposed to linger. On the road, while mending a puncture, I was surprised to be hailed by name by the driver of a passing lorry, who proved to be the driver with whom I had made my difficult trip from Canton to Changsha. He had left us immediately afterwards, apparently overcome by the rigours of cross-country travel, but had later taken a job with a transportation company. Unlike most Chinese lorry-drivers, he was an amiable fellow : curious how often being in charge of a motor, especially a lorry or bus, brings out the worst in the oriental character. At Kweiyang I had to stay over for a lunch party owing to the presence of old friends, two rich Chinese associates of the Company. It was an excellent party of its kind ; beer, brandy and, above all, the dreaded Mao Tai flowed like water. I struck a losing vein at the finger game, at which by this time I could usually more than hold my own, and finally set out for the West late in the afternoon in a sorry condition. We stopped the night at an inn at Anshun, of which my recollection is foggy.

I was away early, having set myself a journey of 180 miles over doubtful roads. All went well enough at first, the road being rough but not too hilly and comparatively straight. A few miles west of Anshun is a waterfall of immense height, perhaps 150 feet, which I wanted to photograph in order to prove to the Company the very limited scope of water transport in Kweichow, but there was not yet enough light and we pushed on. I was watching my mileage per hour jealously, and it steadily fell from twenty to fifteen, until we passed the first daily bus stage from Kweiyang at lunch-time. After this the trouble started. The surface went all to pieces, and I was twice held up by carburettor trouble due to dust ; but the

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chief enemy was the terrain. The mountains in this region run in great ridges from north to south, and travelling west we had no sooner struggled in exhausting spirals up one ridge than we were faced with a precipitous descent in low gear and another climb on the other side. My average dropped to ten, and finally to eight; I stopped only ten minutes to eat that day, but after a day of spectacular scenery—I would have exchanged all the scenery in Asia for a mile of wide, straight road—night caught us still labouring over the mountains. On and on we went, each bend negotiated revealing another, passing in pitch darkness some of the most useless country in the world. It was very lonely, and forgotten childhood fears of the dark and being lost hovered, I think, round all of us, Lin and the driver and myself, so that we found ourselves speaking in whispers for fear of waking some evil spirit. Suddenly, as I was driving round a bend with my eyes glued on the beam of my headlights as it picked its way between the high mountain on the left and the unseen abyss on the right, suddenly it happened; out of the lower blackness clambered a tawny shape: for an instant two yellow eyes burned before us: then the great leopard turned and loped along for a few strides in front of us, gathered itself, and sprang up and away into the oblivion of the unlighted hillside.

This episode, oddly enough, improved our spirits, and we were quite cheerful when we arrived, near midnight, at the first town in Yunnan. We had to awaken the guard to get through the gate, and awaken the innkeeper when we finally found the unlighted inn, but there were beds of some sort into which we gratefully tumbled, to rise unwillingly with the disobliging dawn. After our nocturnal arrival, I had a shock when I poked my face, now disfigured by a substantial red beard, out of the window and saw no less than nine bearded Englishmen having breakfast in the courtyard. They were naval details, from the British gunboats at Chungking, on their way back to the high seas by way of Yunnan and Indo-China.

The sun shone brilliantly over Yunnan. After the murk of Kweichow, it was a joy to ride over the rolling plains, to watch the tree-tops emerging from the mist in the hollows and to feel the kindly sun on my cheek. The road was better, and

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I was at Kunming (or Yunnanfu) by lunch-time. We seemed, at 5000 feet, to be on top of a world bathed in sunshine. It seemed glorious then, but before I left Yunnan province I had cause to reflect that while the sun sheds radiance it fosters the seeds of corruption.

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IT was December 1938, and the weather in Yunnan was perfect, not a cloud in the sky by night or day, warm in the sun and cool in the shade. A cynical American lady said it was like the much-vaunted climate of California, too hot by day and too cold by night, but I found it bracing and stimulating. The country was tawny and mostly barren on the road from the east, with mountains always visible, either near or far, and tracts of something like moorland in between. The broad pattern of Yunnan is consistent, and as in Hunan and Kwangtung its towns are all of the same stamp. Ninety per cent of the land is useless, steep mountains with barren soil and no irrigation. Periodically the traveller comes to a sort of valley, less a valley than a flat interval between the hills where the moisture is caught and held, and here he will find rice fields and a town as big as the rice fields can support. To the west the new road climbs gradually, past the lovely lake Tali, on to Paoshan and the frontier and Lashio and Mandalay. To the south the railway creeps down dangerous curves and spectacular gradients to Indo-China and the outside world. To the north-west, where nobody goes, are the mountains where the young Yangtse passes through its upper gorges, visited by only one Englishman to my knowledge, and far to the north-east lies Chungking : but no motor vehicles move far in these two directions. To the east, in peace-time, you will be able to motor two thousand miles to Shanghai.

Yunnanfu itself is a well-built city, with some broad streets of big cobbles or flagstones, and a great gate in the Peking style with a roof on the top standing like a triumphal arch across the main intersection. Although the road- and rail-heads were the cause of its present prosperity, Yunnanfu had owed its existence to its position athwart the different trade routes for many centuries before motors were thought of, and its streets were still filled all day with strings of pack animals from every

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point of the compass, bearing merchandise to and from the heart of China and far into the neighbouring countries, over the cruel mountain barriers, along the tortuous ancient paths, finally slithering and sliding over the unfriendly pavement. What was left of the road was taken up by spans of oxen and their screeching wains, and herds of sheep and goats, so that the motorist had to proceed at a walking pace and with his horn out-bellowing the beasts.

There are few modern buildings in the city, and I found our office in a handsome old Chinese house with a courtyard in the centre. I stayed at first in the Grand Hôtel du Lac. The lake which gave it its name was not impressive, but the building was new but in perfect taste, all Chinese in style and resembling an official's house with big courtyards and bright-green dragonish roofs. It was here that I got my first impression of the Yunnanese. There were bells in the rooms but nobody ever bothered to answer them. The shiny newness of the exterior was not matched by cleanliness within. In fact the servants were bone-idle, and the early mornings were made hideous by the screams and vituperation of an old French gorgon of a manageress who strove by whips and scorpions to induce an industry that was simply not there. It was icy cold at night, and walking across the courtyards in search of a bathroom was reminiscent of undergraduate days. There were a few Americans in the hotel, and I was disconcerted to see them boiling their coffee on a little spirit stove filled with the very Mao Tai wine of which only two days before I had been drinking my fill.

There was a variety of foreign goods in the shops, and the prices were exceedingly high, while the fact that the Yunnan dollar was worth one-tenth of the Chinese dollar made matters seem even worse. Some of the shops had Greek, a few French proprietors, but of course the great majority were Chinese. One and all they indulged in the French-imported siesta, the shops closing for the whole afternoon. I never knew such a place for shopping. If you went to buy before ten, you got mixed up with the belated cleaning-up process, and the proprietor was liable to be half dressed. From noon to 4 P.M. everything was closed, and by 5 P.M. it was dusk anyway. I cannot altogether subscribe to Mr. Coward's notion that

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Englishmen detest a siesta : on the contrary, I know places where to work in the heat of the day is all but impossible : but in Yunnan, which has the most temperate and equable climate in the whole Far East, it seemed unnecessary that the best hours of the day, as well as the whole of the night, should be devoted to repose.

Sloth was not the only vice (and such an un-Chinese vice) of the Yunnanese. Commercial stupidity, equally un-Chinese, was another. Elsewhere, when I was discussing business with one of our dealers I could be sure that my points of argument would be taken, if not necessarily agreed to, but in Yunnan they just looked at me with a dogged dullness and did nothing. They had not the faintest idea how to sell cigarettes or where to buy them, and this in a period of scarcity when their agency for us was worth a fortune to every one of them if they had used their wits. I soon got on the road, and went to Mengtze, down to the south, passing a most lovely lake in the train, with a fancy border of intricately terraced rice fields, and found a very mixed town. There were Annamites from "India", as they called Indo-China or Burma, and a lot of the Lolo tribesmen and women, as well as the Chinese themselves. There were also a great many bullocks in the narrow streets. In Yunnan towns the roads seemed to take the place, to some extent, of the rivers of South China. While the residents reclined and the shops put up their shutters, the transients moved always on. There is no siesta for the ponies of the caravans.

I went to most of the other sizeable towns in reach of car and rail, for by this time travelling had so got into my blood that I could not endure a dot on the map if it did not call an image to my mind. Moreover, we had left the direction of our business for the last ten years to a Chinese manager, and we suspected that abuses had grown up which did not appear on the surface, as had been happening in Changsha. It was thus desirable that the foreigner should make direct contact with the country dealers, and acquaint them with our precise terms of business and the allotment of goods available to them. We found for example that our Yunnanfu dealers, who were about the only wideawake people in Yunnan, were buying almost the whole of our goods and selling them at a profit to

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outside dealers, who should have been dealing direct with us. Some of the country agents I called on were even moved to something like enthusiasm when they heard that they would get their fair share of what was going in future. This adjustment would not of course immediately increase our total sales, but the principle of regional control was one which had served the Company well for many years, and the alternative — having all our sales in a province passing through one very strong Chinese agency — meant in the end building up a power which would be able to dictate policy to us. There is good historic precedent, among governors, for the policy of preventing coalescence of the governed. I felt embarrassed on behalf of our Chinese manager, for he was rapidly losing the very big "face" that he had built up during his period of office; our local dealers treated us without that affectionate regard that we expected — they did not even invite us to dinner: but my new *taipan* was an active and ruthless "cleaner-up", and together we rooted out and burned old records and scrubbed clean and let in light and built anew with a true reformatory zeal.

The foreigners in town were a mixed lot, mostly newcomers to China. I met a few old friends belonging to the oil companies and some of the Liuchow and Hanoi aviators, but on the whole was unhappy socially. In the Cercle Sportif a bevy of beefy Germans were always to be found along the bar, often behind it as well, smoking cigars and apparently owning the place. In the centre of the main room a large crowd of American flying men sat, shooting craps and uttering the loud cries appropriate to that form of recreation. Odds and ends like myself wandered aimlessly around, and the French, admitted as it were on sufferance to their own club, played bagatelle or bridge in the little rooms. I was once lured into a game of bridge. The stakes were modest, but my volatile partner made such vast side bets on the issue of the rubber that nobody, in three hours, scored below the line at all, any sacrifice being cheaper than to lose a rubber. Those who were not to be found in the club were probably sitting around in one of the two hotels, drinking purposefully and expensively. There was a flying school near by, staffed with an American C.O. and instructors. There were two mercenary fighter pilots, one of

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whom was English. To save petrol they were never allowed to fly except when the enemy was sighted, but they did a good deal of execution in spite of lack of practice. Preparations were on foot to establish aircraft bases and works further west, which brought further aviation men. I met the admirable American, with his wife, whom I had encountered at Shiukwan, and they told me the sad story of months of delay caused in the transportation to Yunnan of their aircraft factory, due to a disagreement between the Chinese War Department and the South-West Transportation Company, also a Government concern, regarding the price to be paid for the move. Finally there were American pilots of Chiang's personal staff, so that there was much aviation "shop" in the conversations every evening. I missed the old "family" atmosphere of other outposts, with the Consul-General or the Commissioner of Customs to be found in the place of honour at any dining-table. To complete my distaste for my European associates, on Christmas Eve I involved myself, on a mixture of whisky and champagne, in a fight with a revolting Frenchman in a bar, and it was not much consolation, when I regained consciousness out in the yard in a downpour of rain, to learn that he had until lately been a professional heavyweight boxer.

The Yunnanese were so idle and stupid that they deserved to be exploited, I thought, by the French, by each other and by an individual called Mr. Miao. I had already seen, in Kwangsi, that the unity between some of the provincial governments and the Central Government did not go very deep. Yunnanese politics reeked with corruption and graft, and it was believed by many that Mr. Miao was ready to sell his province to the highest bidder. He was in full control of all the tin which passed out of China, and tin was one of the biggest sources of foreign exchange remaining. Besides what he made out of it — being able to prevent any shipment until what he considered as his dues were paid — he levied illegal taxes on all other goods, and also, through his own bank, controlled almost the whole business of remittance and exchange between Yunnan and the outer world. Small wonder therefore that after the Chinese Customs, the French, who had not built their railway for love, and finally Mr. Miao had all taken their share, prices of imported goods were fantastically high. Chiang

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Kai-shek, like General Smuts, knew when to bide his time.

Tin really built the railway, which, to give it its due, was a great engineering feat. Yunnan is probably one of the world's greatest storehouses of unexploited minerals, but its surface is so forbidding and intolerant of passage that it will be many years, I daresay, before they will be developed on a grand scale. To get enough to feed the railway, which charges the world's highest freight rates, the Chinese have only scratched the surface. I learned how this was done from a mining engineer, commissioned by the Chinese Government to investigate possibilities of increasing production at the existing mines. He went down South for two days, taking his wife along for the trip. They both came back looking as though they had seen ghosts. Perhaps they had, for this is what they told me :

The mine was in a valley high up in the hills. The workings were small pits near the surface. The workers were small boys. These boys were either kidnapped or bought cheap from needy parents at the age of ten, and put to work at once. They had no covering, year in and year out, but a blanket, and only a bare allowance of rice and water. Their average life after starting work in the mines was from two to three years. As night fell a thick wet mist crept up the valley, seeping into the little pits, covering one after another of the little forms as they huddled together for warmth, and the silence of the long mountain night was torn by the incessant, agonised coughing of a thousand tubercular children. I suppose that after enriching their taskmasters and Mr. Miao, each child was contributing more than any other poor Chinese to the winning of the war. *Dulce et decorum . . .* but it was just the same in peacetime : will it be so again ?

I had come to Yunnanfu from Chungking along two sides of a right-angled triangle, due south to Kweiyang, due west into Yunnan. I now decided to explore the hypotenuse, to visit two cities in the north-east corner of the province, where foreign business men had not been for twenty years. The weather was bitterly cold and wet, unusually for those parts, so I bought myself a vast overcoat of peculiar cut, and set off just after Christmas on a journey that was to prove the most intense and sustained experience I had known. I started with nothing

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but enthusiasm, delighted to leave the capital and to take my still damaged face to regions where nobody who mattered would see it. I had a devastating cold, and I did not know the way, but my interpreter and friend, Liu, was an able and intelligent Chinese, and we were determined to "get there" somehow.

The start was better than we expected. The road ran east, then north-east, but nobody knew how far, and we expected it to peter out at any moment. Amazingly, we kept going in our well-loaded old car, up and up. I did not see much of the scenery as we were often in cloud; the trees were heavy with frost; at some periods the interminable teams of mules or horses pattered along with us, inclined to panic at our approach, however discreetly we drove; at others they disappeared along short cuts and for a few miles we saw no living thing. At length we came to a place where the road had apparently died. Grass and weeds grew all over it, and no wheel marks scarred its surface, yet still it wound on and on, and feeling like trespassers in another age we continued on our way. Later we came to more mountains and hewn rock road again, and finally struggled up a long valley with an empty, stony river bed till we came to the town of Tungchwan, more than half-way to my destination.

Tungchwan was not much of a town. It was situated, as usual, in a flat valley, and its one straggling street was much congested with four-footed passers-by. I took a quick look at the market, having now trained myself to size up the cigarette situation pretty quickly, found it dim and the dealer not much brighter. I left him closeted with Liu, who might be expected to browbeat him into some kind of activity, and paid a swift call at the Methodist Mission, where I found a kind but tired young couple much worried over the health of their baby. The dealer's dinner was a brighter event than I had expected. In Tungchwan the leading gentlemen run a Duck Club, and once a week they dine — off duck, of course — in the house of one of the members. This was not a Club night, but the duck was excellent, and the company greatly enlivened by a sergeant. The sergeant was a grand character, the best Chinese soldier I ever saw. He was on sick leave from a wound he had received at the great Chinese victory at Taierchwang, in Shantung pro-

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vince, which had been the one bright spot in the war for China. He spoke Mandarin, and a few Gambeis so loosened my tongue and stimulated my memory that we talked almost fluently. We played fingers till we were both hoarse, he using his wounded arm which had now healed, though not quite in the shape God had intended, and we so enjoyed ourselves that he besought me, almost with tears in his eyes, to stay another day and help him celebrate his last night of leave. But the chairs and the porters were already engaged, and I was eager to be on my way.

The procession that set off was all in due order. My chair had four bearers, two in front, one behind and one in reserve, a tribute at once to my social and physical eminence. Liu had three bearers and my servant only two, while three porters with carrying poles brought up the rear — it being my principle, from long experience, never to travel light unless it is necessary. The chairs were two long bamboo poles with a few cross-bars, and we contrived to make them comparatively comfortable with the help of pillows and blankets; but they were very springy, and as the bearers, unlike Chinese soldiers, walked in step, the jogging motion was considerable. Cold as it was, I thought I had better ride at least out of town — it being a Chinese principle, not mine, never to walk unless one has to — and we set forth at a spanking pace down the street. The bearers were sturdy and active and very arrogant. As they stamp-stamped over the paving-stones, the steam already rising from their warming bodies, they shouted haughty curses at any passer-by who was foolish enough to impede so important a convoy. Purpose and pride were the order of the day.

Clear of the town, I got down and walked. We were walking for some hours over flat, fertile, marshy land before we went up into the hills, and I saw some lovely marsh birds, great red-headed cranes and others, soaring with deceptive speed or reflected, doubly motionless, in the pool where they stood. The air was crisp and fresh, and at least the rain held off, and it was good to be moving. The road I was travelling is as old as any in the world, just as the method I used is timeless. A century ago endless caravans had carried the foreign opium from French territory to the myriad pipes of Szechwan, but the trade route is as old as trade itself, and therefore as old as

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China. I calculated that at any given moment there were twenty thousand animals moving up and down the 400-mile route from Yunnanfu to Ipin, on the Yangtse, a little above Chungking, a thousand every day on each of the twenty stages. Besides the beasts and their attendant grooms, there was a host of porters, some with baskets or tins hanging from the poles over their shoulders, some with great rocks of salt, some with bulkier loads of anything from leaves for Chinese medicines to empty paraffin tins — I saw one man creeping like a snail under seventy-five five-gallon empty petrol cans.

We had about a hundred miles to go, and proposed to do it in five stages instead of the four usual in summer, but the first day was a long one. Before midday we had left the flat lands and were spiralling up into the mountains. We walked abruptly into fog, as it were through a door. The moisture froze in great crystal clusters on the trees, frosted our faces and clothes, melted and seeped into the material. My cold was troubling me, and at a slippery spot I twisted a knee which worried me throughout the rest of the trip. My "boy" had previously been with missionaries and did not in general much approve of my mode of life, but to my surprise he took happily to the austerity of travel, and when we passed a miserable wayside tea-house he popped inside, pushed everything off the charcoal fire and in no time produced hot coffee for Liu and myself. All day we plodded and slithered over unseen hills. With my sore knee I rode, on the flatter stretches, until I became too cold to endure it any longer. Liu seemed to have become completely petrified in his chair, except that his head hung forward when descending, backward when climbing. The succession of horses first intrigued, then infuriated me. Every half-hour or so, travelling at our superior speed, we would overtake a team, or caravan, and getting past the loaded animals on the narrow, slippery and tortuous path was always a difficult feat for solitary walkers, still more so for the chair-men. At shorter intervals we met teams coming the other way; when both streams of traffic coincided the congestion was extreme, and I repeatedly had to clamber off the road to avoid being trampled underfoot by the frightened and harassed brutes.

This affliction decreased as the day advanced, since the teams on the daily stage were already beyond the half-way



PORTERS RESTING, NORTH-EAST YUNNAN

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mark ; but instead it began to drizzle through the cloud, and as we had not started as early as we should, I presently found myself for the third time benighted on a Chinese hillside. Only this time I had no car roof, no friendly engine-noise to comfort me. The chair-men were displeased ; they had wished to stop for the night at the half-stage, and muttered about bandits, so there was no consolation there. Liu and the " boy " had apparently lapsed into coma. The village we were to stop at was in the valley of a little mountain stream, and on the last stage we followed its almost vertical course. I felt weary and very, very far from home. The night was black as pitch and it was a peevish, as well as an exhausted, party that at last stumbled off the hillside into the rough village street. The next thing was to find accommodation — luckily the third and the last inn had a room free, and we piled in. In fact, it had exactly one room, apart from the extensive stables, and here we erected my camp bed, which I thought it wise to superimpose on the wooden fixture that was the only furniture. We procured charcoal and a brazier, and made a fire to dry out a portion of our bedclothes and make a hot drink. In spite of being tired I did not sleep well, for the snores of men and many horses penetrated the rude walls, and I could hear rats on the move. Besides, it was early for bed, though it had been three hours dark, but for once we had got beyond, in distance and poverty, the scope of foreign oil or even candles, and the little pans of vegetable oil gave a miserable light that was harder on the eyes and nerves than complete darkness, and there was nothing for it but to retire. Lying awake, one was at least spared bad dreams.

For the next few days the pattern of life was much the same. There was not much more cloud, and the weather was bitterly cold, with a wicked wind swirling over the mountain-sides. The second day I paid more attention to my fellow travellers on the road. The horses or mules, all very small by European standards, walked in teams of ten to fifteen. Each team had a leader, decked with rude ornaments and with a bell on his neck, who could be relied on to keep to the right path and to respond to his groom's instructions. The remainder merely followed head to tail, or if they got scattered in some *mêlée*, rallied to the leader. The grooms were an evil-looking tribe,

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better than their beasts only in the abused gift of mastery. Some wore wide-brimmed hats with pot crowns, not unlike the traditional hats of Spanish horsemen or toreadors, and all clasped blankets around them against the cold with one hand while the other brandished the goad. They were cruel overseers, fear their only medium of intercourse with their slaves, kicks, blows and curses so vile that only they could devise or understand them, their only means of self-expression. Liu told me that grooms are traditionally a despised race in China, and I did not doubt it, as I watched a horse which had been run into and upset its panniers, being beaten until its guardian was tired. Galls and sores received no attention except as a means of inflicting more punishment with less effort, yet still the horses marched on, dragging themselves up the hills and feeling their way deliberately down, pathetically anxious to give of their best, to serve the Man. Curious how this faithfulness and humility, in horses or in women, can bring out the best or the undreamed-of worst in a man, so that he will even shock or astonish himself in his reaction. I noticed many of the South-bound teams were carrying wood-oil, one of China's biggest exports in peace-time, now trickling laboriously out in pony-loads instead of charging in big steamers and lighters down the Yangtse. Yet each load meant more foreign exchange and more guns for China. Often among the North-bound traffic I was glad to see the long shiny tins, two or three to an animal, that contained each fifteen thousand of our cigarettes.

I felt all the time that I was in Asia rather than China, the bleak, bad inner Asia where cruelty and bitterness are man's only gesture in face of the challenge of a ruthless Nature. There was none of the wealth of China, the grace and humour and abundant energy ; only a dogged beaten perseverance, as of men marooned in an open boat who refuse to die till they have to. Nobody lived here, except in the few villages on the road, and they for the most part lived only to serve the caravans. On the other hand there was no shortage of visible death — the pack animals lay where they fell. I remember one in particular that had broken its heart near a village. The curs had swarmed out from the miserable hovels and were disembowelling it hideously and — weak as they were from hunger and disease — with difficulty. I saw in a flash why

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the privilege of burial was so sacred a boon to warriors from mythological days onwards. The children were filthy and sickly. Many of the villagers had goitre, as well, no doubt, as other diseases. I have spoken of the grooms ; the porters, like the salt-carriers of Kweichow, could sometimes scarcely move under their loads. Each carried a stout flat-topped staff with which he punted himself, so to speak, up the hills, and which he used as a stool on which to rest his load when he had to take a rest without unbuckling. I wondered who would bury them when they dropped at last. Our chair-men were the best of this unhappy crew, for they were highly-paid workmen, comparatively, and in the express passenger class. Even Liu had difficulty in understanding their very guttural and limited speech. The only approach to a song I heard in all these days was the unison groan with which they accompanied their pause to move the pole on to the other shoulder.

If days were grim, nights were a misery. The first three nights I was troubled more or less by rats, and the fourth night we reached a village that consisted entirely of four inns. Each inn had accommodation for perhaps two hundred horses, and there were odd lofts and cupboards for the grooms and any other human visitors. I had a little room in the corner of the courtyard, not much more than a stall, but with my camp bed erected and a charcoal brazier glowing cheerfully it did not seem so bad. It was New Year's Eve, 1938-9, and as a gesture I bought six-pennyworth of corn spirit, so Liu and I had a little party on our own. We retired for the night at about 9 P.M., and with the help of the drink I quickly got to sleep. I woke up at midnight, dreaming I had been run over by a train ; it was a relief to find myself intact, but not for long. Through the partitions I could hear the grooms and chair-men shouting and quarrelling — they smoked opium every night, and, contrary to vulgar opinion, it stimulated them and made them truculent ; there was a smell of horse, and the occasional shifting of a hoof ; somebody was snoring like a foghorn ; and the fire had gone down to a dim red glow. I became conscious of all this before I was aware of the weight on my body which I had taken in my nightmare for the train. Suddenly my scalp began to tingle, for the weight was moving. For a moment I was frozen, utterly immobile : then with an effort I broke the

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spell and jerked convulsively. Two indignant rats leaped, thud ! to the floor. As I lay there, feeling suddenly cold, my eyes gradually adapted themselves to the gloom, lighted by one charcoal ember and an oil lamp outside which shone through the cracks, and I saw that my two visitors were only an outpost for the main body. There were innumerable rats—I counted up to sixteen, and there must have been more that I did not see. I gathered from their conversation that very few horses were in that night, and it had been decided by the Rodent Union to get all hands to a tunnelling job that needed doing. There was a thick baulk of timber to be penetrated before the hotel communications system could be completed. They worked methodically but with a certain inhuman frenzy ; as many as there was room for gnawed madly at the obstacle with the precision and penetration of so many electrical picks, while the remainder rested or carried away the debris or struggled for a place at the front. As they worked they conversed in loud squeaks, and the whole mass of them quivered with consuming energy. I looked at my watch, and saw that it was 1939, a good year for rats on the whole. For the rest of that night my state of mind need hardly be described.

The last stage was a short one, and we were soon among the rice fields and vegetable plots that sustain the city of Chaotung. Here we were roughly half-way, as the crow flies, from Yunnanfu to Chungking. Most of the beasts and men of burden operated only on one half of the route or the other, so Chaotung was a busy transshipping point, seething with equine activity. It was also a fair-sized town, with a surprising amount of goods, including cigarettes, in the shops. I was delighted to find a hotel that did not accommodate horses, and to find a room that was not, indeed, polished or luxurious, but had at least partitions up to the ceiling, a window, and a floor that could be cleaned. We duly went out to call on the dealer. He was not very bright—that we already knew from his sales figures—nor was he particularly pleased to see us, perhaps because his shop contained a good proportion of our rivals' cigarettes. Mr. Liu and I spent the next two days alternately trying to instil into the dealer a bit of enthusiasm for an agency out of which with a little energy he could make a very nice income, and giving it up as a bad job and seeking, in vain, a



RECRUITS AT CHAOTUNG

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more promising agent amongst other local merchants. Our plan was in future to lay down our own stocks in Chaotung, instead of letting the dealer send for them all the way to Yunnanfu when he had disposed of the last lot and found a good way to remit his money. When he began to realise how much this would help him in opposition to other local merchants who were buying from the Yunnanfu local market, he began to show signs of life at last, and finally agreed to make the expenditure on developing his premises that we demanded.

When I returned, tired and discouraged, to the hotel the first evening, I was surprised to find the courtyard crowded with young men. They were dressed in rags, but from an occasional military touch in their garb, here a rotted bandolier, there an odd puttee, I deduced that they were soldiers. I then noted that they were tied together, by wrist and ankle, with string, the sort of token bonds with which newly arrested prisoners in China are usually secured when they are marched through the streets. I was told they were new recruits, impressed in the remote villages of Yunnan, now concentrated at Chaotung ready to be sent down, fourteen days' journey, to a training establishment near the Kweichow border. They were no more than boys, most of them, and their mothers would have wept to see their pitiful condition of misery and cold. Later they were taken upstairs, to sleep if they could on the narrow gallery over the courtyard or the landing outside my room and Liu's, which were the only two. There were seventy of them, in strings of ten, and there was not much room to move, even if they had not huddled together for warmth; they were packed so close round my partition that, although the temperature was at freezing point, their warmth so communicated itself to me that I could sleep without a blanket. At night their groans and curses and, for all I know, prayers mingled into a dreadful, bestial hubbub, as if some poor animals, less human than monkeys, were corralled together for slaughter. Sanitation of course was non-existent, and the bonds were not loosed. Before retiring I saw one detached and laid on a few handfuls of straw on the cobbled courtyard under the frosty stars. They said he had been brought seven days' march with very little food, and was ill from exposure. The second night another died, and was discovered in the morning still tied

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to his comrades. Perhaps one day they would make good soldiers ; the press-gang played its part in our own history, and conscription is a necessary evil in modern war, especially in China, for I never actually heard, in all my travels, of a Chinese who volunteered to fight for his country. But in the face of this abject despair I had to remember the doomed boys in the tin mines, and the gallant ponies dropping in their tracks to feed the pariah dogs, and to reflect on how China rewarded her best servants in these ugly days.

Having put the business in some sort of order, I set out gladly for home. As always, the return journey seemed less formidable. The mornings were still dark, but towards noon the sun battled its way through the mists and I had hastily to discard articles of clothing as I walked. In the sunshine the country, wild and barren as it was, took on colour and seemed less uncompromisingly hostile. Wiser than before, I walked ahead of the party alone in the afternoons, and by arriving earlier was better able to choose my lodging in the light of experience. I could never quite get away from the rats, but I managed to sleep better. One evening, after I had secured accommodation and was resting under a tree until the others should come up, a North-bound party passed me, consisting of a tall missionary on foot and two unhappy foreign women in chairs — a wholesome reminder that I was not the only one who had to endure the society of rats. Presently the missionary came out of his inn with extended hand, saying in the approved formula, " Mr. Dobson, I presume ? " He wanted to ask me to take the Tungchwan missionary's wife and baby, who were ill, with me back to Yunnanfu. I said I would see what could be done, and there followed a conversation of only a quarter of an hour which I shall always remember with gratitude. We talked about England, and the Backs at Cambridge, and had a brisk discussion on the honourable question whether or not a good historian should be strictly objective. This talk let into my mind, misted with the macabre experiences of the last few days, such a draught of fresh European air that I walked for the next two days in a warm blanket of nostalgia, hardly noticing the austerities of the road till we stamped back again along the main and only street of Tungchwan.

The rest is soon told. I called on Mr. and Mrs. P., who

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gave me tea and some excellent cake, and arranged to squeeze Mrs. P. and the child into the already full car, somehow. I found the sergeant had overstayed his leave till my return, so we had another terrific blind. I distinctly remember, when a herd of pigs went down the road heading south, my host telling me, in a deprecating voice as if he did not wish to insult a respectable animal, that pigs are the bankers of Yunnan. Anybody who wishes to send money to the capital, it seems, buys a herd of pigs in the outlying town and has it driven to Yunnanfu. There it is sold, and according to the losses of the herd in numbers or weight, his remittance transaction is profitable or otherwise. At dawn Mrs P. came to say that her husband was ill too, and in spite of my arguments she was determined to stay with him. At the last moment I decided, against my better judgement, to take the whole family, and aided no doubt by the Lord, after a harassing journey in which I had to walk up the hills and all three members of the P. family were sick, the grossly overloaded car struggled into Yunnanfu.

Mr. P. had an urgent appendectomy next day, so I was glad of my decision. I started at once preparing for a trip to Teng Yueh, the old south-westernmost city of China, and the Burma frontier, but the night before I was to start a telegram arrived ordering me to Changsha instead. So after a fond farewell to Lin and Liu I headed eastwards again. 1939 had begun badly for me, and it was as if those rats had put a curse on me, for I was never happy inside China again ; I left behind me the sloth and dirt and stupid cruelty of Yunnan, but in front of me was the closer devastation of war.

II

ANTI-CLIMAX

EVERYTHING went wrong with that journey. The sun shone until we crossed the Kweichow border, then disappeared, not to be seen again for a period of months. Kweiyang, still crammed with refugees, was as cold as charity, without in any other way calling that virtue to mind. I was expecting to be met here by the station waggon from Changsha, but it did not materialise, and after several days of chilling boredom I decided to push on. Fifty miles on, in a desolate vale, the front spring gave way, suddenly and finally. The chauffeur went off to find a village and porters to remove the baggage, and for two hours I sat alone, while no cars passed by. Then to my delight the station waggon came in sight, and behind it, miraculously, a breakdown van, so we returned to the village in style, and next morning I changed cars and set off again. The new car had the necessary springs but not much else. The brakes were non-existent. The tyres were shockingly worn. The horn did not work, nor did the windscreen-wiper. It was pouring with rain, and as we felt our way gingerly over the desperately muddy, cruelly tortuous mountain roads, it seemed only a question of time before we should break down again.

The second night saw us only as far as Chenyuan, the only town in Eastern Kweichow, and a very small one at that. We had, however, a cheering welcome from the dealer, and as good a meal as could be produced so late at night, and *kaoliang* wine to revive our spirits. Next day we struggled on through the rain. The lack of a horn, oddly enough, was our worst handicap, as the roads were full of soldiers plodding eastwards, or walking-wounded tottering westwards with their eyes on the ground, and they never saw us coming. The only thing was to de-clutch and race the engine, whereupon the poor fellows scattered in a panic and cursed us from the ditches as we splashed slowly by. Towards evening we came to a ferry where there was a hold-up. A lorry loaded with bombs had broken

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down on the approach, partly blocking the gang-planks that led to the pontoons, and a score of lorries were waiting for it to be repaired. I thought that, though a lorry could not pass, my car could just squeeze by; the drivers objected but I pushed past them and proceeded to drive up the planks. My wheels skidded on the wet boards, and I suddenly found myself quite still, the car's belly on one of the boards, and all four wheels revolving gently in mid-air. At that moment, with a crash and a roar, the front lorry re-started and the road was clear. The next hours were too horrible. The drivers were in an ugly mood, half jeering, half cursing, and I had to work like a black, piling stones under the wheels, heaving and praying, lest they should take matters into their own hands and demolish my wretched car altogether. It was raining and it was dark, and of course we had to wait, when we got clear, for all the lorries to cross before us, and the evening was rounded off by a sleepless night in a tiny hotel where the other guests stayed up all night chattering and playing Mah-jongg. Next day I went only to Yuanling, for we needed a rest and there was a nasty case of theft to be investigated. I remembered my enjoyment at visiting the city two years before, but the rain had obliterated its charm and the nature of my business was not conducive to good cheer.

I set out on the fifth day in hopes of reaching Changsha before night, and successfully crossed the mountains, but on a straight stretch of road a lorry coming in the opposite direction failed to give way, and we were forced down a slope into a paddy field. I jumped out and laid hands on the lorry-driver with murder in my heart, but the officer with him made conciliatory noises and explained that the wretched man had been driving for eighteen hours without a rest. Armed with a very genuine wrath and a diplomatic status assumed for the occasion, I insisted on his sending for help, and we started to dig in the rain while he was away. Eventually we were dragged back on to the road, but too late to travel much further, so we spent the night at Changteh.

The city had been badly bombed, but the Mission Hospital was still there, and the hospitable Dr. Tootell was in the midst of one of his interminable campaigns to raise funds. One of my invariable practices had been to pay a call on an old

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German gentleman called Rose, who was a buyer of wood-oil for a British company. He lived in a room with his very German belongings, talking always fondly of his children distinguishing themselves in their schools in Germany, and of "Our Fuehrer". He was very hospitable and very deaf. His *ménage* consisted of a pair of dachshunds for which I felt a deep pity; a perverse nature had made the female so large and the male so small that, though they were the only members of their species for hundreds of miles, they could never be more to one another than friends. But Rose was there no longer; his plant had been bombed, and at the age of seventy he had travelled 250 miles in a sampan, through the Chinese and Japanese lines, to Hankow, and had since made his way by Japanese steamer down to Shanghai. As I write (November 1943) the Japanese are raging through the streets of Changteh, and I think of the kindly Doctor who will certainly be fighting a desperate lonely battle for the people he has served so long.

From here it should have been two and a half hours' run to Changsha, but the road had deteriorated sadly with war traffic and rain, and we had punctures, so it was in a failing afternoon light that I first saw the awful desolation that had been a thriving city. A time had come in December when the Chinese authorities considered that the Japanese, pushing from Hankow in the north and Kiangsi province in the east, could no longer be resisted. They had invoked the "scorched earth" policy with a vengeance. Troops had poured oil in through the doors and windows of every house in street after street, and in the middle of the night more troops drove by in lorries and lobbed grenades and incendiary bombs. No adequate warning had been given, and many of the million citizens had no time to save their lives, still less their property, from what was to be the biggest fire in recorded history; the foreigners called it the "scorched flesh" policy, and there was reason in the bitter jest. In the chaos and horror the foreigners fought to save their offices and godowns, but in vain: one after another they went up in smoke, all except our Company's big concrete building, which stood scatheless in a jungle of fire, the Union Jack, charred but not consumed, flapping an eerie defiance through the wrack. The soldiers must have become infected with a mad lust for destruction, for where the fire

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flagged they stoked it with oil, and what they could not burn they attacked with crowbar and axe.

Three days later, when smoke was still rising from the collective pyre, came — not the Japanese, but the Generalissimo and his wife and his chiefs of staff (accompanied by the British Ambassador) to proclaim a mistake and to administer rebukes and punishment if they could find any culprits. When I arrived, five weeks later, the city was still dead. A few of the very poor had crept back to build themselves hovels of matting between the remaining walls, and in outlying areas a few shops, still intact, were beginning to open their shutters, but the main streets were not only destroyed, they were obliterated without trace in the indistinguishable acres of rubble and ash. As it grew dark the rain made black mud of the charred remains of doors and beams, mercifully damping the occasional odour of carrion, but accentuating the gloom that coloured my homecoming to Changsha.

Immediately after the fire most of the foreigners from the island — a sadly depleted community already — “refugeed” to the installations, the A.P.C. on the left bank, the S.V.O.C. on the right about three miles downstream. They had taken with them their movable property, in boats and lighters, and the fluid stocks from the Club, and I went down to join them at the A.P.C. They were a tired and shaken body of people, most of them, but their spirit was not broken. They were already thinking of returning to their homes. Old Papa Heinrichsohn, of the German Dye Trust, was back on the island already, and on my second day we all went up to a terrific drunken lunch party by way of house-warming. My predecessor, Maurice, was leaving for a few weeks of well-deserved and badly-needed leave, and as soon as he had gone I moved up to our little island house and settled down to hold the fort until his return.

Days went by, and weeks, and at length I realised that there had been a “change of policy” — Maurice was not coming back, so I slowly and bitterly resigned myself to sit out the summer. We were a weird little community. The British firms all saw fit to change their representatives who had seen the fire. At first there were two A.P.C. men on the island, and we had a Bridge four, but presently they left and there was only one

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at the installation. The gunboat, H.M.S. *Sandpiper*, had a new captain and later some new ratings, but the Doctor and Number One remained. Butterfield and Swire's man operated his lighters from his hulk at the A.P.C. installation. The bar stocks ran low, then ran out entirely, and social life on the island was more and more restricted. Evening after evening I would wander up to the Club, and order a glass of Chinese wine. I might meet there the Commissioner of Customs, a Dane who loved good living but had been three years without it; the Harbour Master, a Londoner with many China years behind him; the Salt Revenue Commissioner, an elderly Russian; and two Germans, Heinrichsohn of "DEFAG", and Czarnetski who lived with a Chinese woman and an adopted Chinese daughter at the end of the island. And that was all. Most of us had no work to do; we had no books to read, no newspapers; mails from the outside world were ever more dearly prized, yet we had no news to write in return. It was a bad time.

When summer brought a higher water level the *Sandpiper* sometimes came up at week-ends; some sort of cricket and football were organised for the men, and the gin held out some months more, carefully husbanded in a most un-naval manner. The only variation from the searing monotony and frustration was through drink; we got drunk and quarrelled because we had not the heart to sing, and because it gave us something to talk and laugh over next day. Our language and manners and habits went from bad to worse. So did our sense of humour. Considerable comic relief was afforded by a Greek merchant-navy captain who arrived about when I did. He was one of a batch sent up to give countenance to the re-registration under the Greek flag of a small fleet of Chinese steamers, contrived by an American firm in Shanghai. His ship was sunk by a near-miss bomb the day before he arrived, and he found her mournfully sitting on the bottom of the falling river. She was later refloated by the efforts of the A.P.C. engineer, but could not be used as her back was broken, and the captain was a man of many sorrows. He was getting his pay regularly, but it seems that pay is only a small part of the income of a Greek merchant captain, by far the greater source being what he called "gratifications" from consignors of cargo. No

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cargo, no gratification, and so the whole time of this twentieth-century Themistocles was taken up in devising means of cutting down his personal expenditure. For a time he lived with some missionaries, but the arrival of two Chinese ladies of very easy virtue to demand payment, on Sunday morning, for services rendered and not adequately recompensed the night before, upset this arrangement. Later he lived in his ship, paying an old Chinese woman fifteen dollars a month to feed and look after him until he left. Yet he was a good man in his way : on his way out through Nanning later on, his driver was machine-gunned and he saved his own life and that of the missionary lady who was with him by his presence of mind under fire.

Two or three times a week I went across the river to Yo Lo Shan, and took a solitary walk over the hill. With the coming of spring no countryside, least of all that of China, is really dull, and it was a momentary joy to see the buds on the trees and feel the earth quake with fertility again ; but the solitude of the country was not sufficient of a contrast to the loneliness of my little house to be an escape from it, and I would return tired rather than refreshed from these excursions. Later they used the hill for military purposes, and by azalea time my walks were at an end. I played against myself at billiards instead until I became half mad with irritation at my own incompetence.

Meanwhile the panic that had set Changsha burning was still in the air. Chinese reverses at Nanchang, to the east, brought alarming rumours, and in March the few thousands of poor people who had returned to the city were urged to leave it again. I offered bets of 2 to 1 against the Japanese getting to Changsha within two weeks, and won. Early in the summer there was a worse panic. Japanese units were active in the Tungting lake ; they were at Yochow and coming on ; they were also advancing from the east. At night the Chinese military began to hold up all river traffic by the simple method of shooting over them with their rifles, and to commandeer all craft for evacuation. When a bullet came into my bedroom window and crashed into the wall above my bed, I thought it was time to move into the spare room at the back. This time I offered evens against the Japanese, and again I won ; the

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panic wore off, and the little people, the hawkers and small shopkeepers and the junk men, came back, till by autumn there were 150,000 people in Changsha.

Old Heinrichsohn gave the best parties. At twelve years old he had developed a weak heart. As a youth he became a missionary, and studied Chinese assiduously for years in Western Hunan. Then one day he changed his mind and took to a full life in every sense. In his household at Changsha, recently bereaved of his wife to whom he was devoted, was an ex-sing-song girl of high class from Peking, and his half-caste son aged about eight was the apple of his eye. At Chinese dinners he made beautiful speeches with the correct interlarding of quotation from the classics. All the girls in town knew him and loved him. He was over six feet, and active as any of us on his sixtieth birthday. He drank prodigiously, and sometimes afterwards his heart troubled him and he would go around with a long face saying he must give it up; but his resolve never outlasted the acuteness of the symptoms, and I daresay he is living as violently and genially as ever today. Sometimes it was a new lot of wine he had got in, sometimes a special fish that was in season — any occasion was good enough to be celebrated. Sometimes the other Germans had parties in their gardens, inviting all the sing-song girls in town. All the little Silver Peaches and Lovely Moons would troop across the river, looking very pretty in their cheap finery, any harshness of tone mitigated by the kind light of the moon. There always seemed to be two or three perched on old Heinie's shoulders and knees, like pigeons on a statue, and with the help of much rice wine and our gramophone records we achieved a certain desperate gaiety. But it was a false enjoyment, a cheap substitute, and we all knew it at the back of our minds. The girls were, after all, poor creatures, for all their airs and vanities. They were not even first-class sing-song girls. Indeed, they were having a bad time, for the police were preying on them more voraciously than ever, pressing their extortions with the threat not of fines or closures, but of conscription into the Comfort Corps, a unit of women which fulfilled a certain function for the troops at the front. Perhaps, too, we were not really very fond of one another, thrown together as we were by circumstance, not

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choice — by the human heart's yearning for the society of its own kind at all costs, and the mind crying out for intercourse. We achieved peaks of unhappiness at these mock-jollifications by which the interminable plains of day-to-day ennui were varied but not enhanced.

Defeat is a dynamic factor in national psychology, working away like a cancer even when no outward symptoms are apparent. This front was static during the summer, yet the Chinese felt they must go on preparing for the worst. One day from the top of Yo Lo Shan I observed that the road to the West had been put out of commission, great chunks chopped neatly out every hundred yards. The railway to the North, leading towards the Hankow front, had been destroyed already ; presently workmen came and tore up the metals to the South, and the puffing of the engines that were carrying them away grew daily fainter until we could hear them no more. For less than two years those six hundred miles of railway had lived, carrying loads far heavier than was ever expected ; now the termini were in the hands of the enemy, and the sleepers were uprooted and taken away for firewood, and the road-bed was being blasted and dug down. I planned to go to Swatow, on the south-east coast, with Heinrichsohn, to investigate the chances of bringing in cigarettes that way, but the Japanese invaded the port the day before we were to leave. After that the southward road was demolished too, as far as Hengyang, 100 miles away. We began to feel shut in.

It may not be obvious what we were in Changsha for. Some of us were doing a much-restricted business. Goods could still be brought from Haiphong-Nanning or Haiphong-Yunnanfu if they were sufficiently valuable to repay the enormous freight rates (cigarettes generally were not). We all had Company's property to look after — the big installations, offices and warehouses — but the real reason for our presence was that it had been observed, when the Japanese captured Yangtse ports, that if foreigners were on the spot they were permitted to remain and open up their business behind the lines ; but where no foreigners were, none were subsequently admitted. It seemed inevitable that sooner or later the Japanese would reach Changsha, and it was our job to be there when they came, to insist if possible on our neutral rights, and to resume

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our normal functions after the occupation. Thus the defeat complex was working in our minds too, and our ideas were focussed on the ultimate fall of Changsha as the justification of our presence. Sometimes we almost longed for it to happen, as one looks forward to an appointment with the dentist, anxious to get it over.

The Germans on the island were loyal but not fanatical, with the exception of one junior assistant of Heinrichsohn; who performed an invaluable function as a catalytic. If we had no other bond, all of us, we were united in our detestation of this horrible youth. He was one of those pale bloodless Nazis, with a cruel face. He did everything he should not. When he was attacked by a dog in a village on the island he went into a hut and bit the owner, causing a riot which Heinie put down with the greatest difficulty. Walking on Yo Lo Shan in defiance of the military he got himself arrested, and when his superiors got him out, promptly did the same thing again. In Heinrichsohn's absence he attended a Company dinner, got unpleasantly drunk, insulted his Chinese hosts and even — incredibly — assaulted them physically, and was brought home battered and bleeding. His recurrent disasters gave us the only real hearty laughs we ever had, and when he was finally bitten by a snake our delight was only moderated by the fact that it turned out not to be poisonous. We discussed European politics amicably enough, except for him, and none of us really expected a war.

Of course there were growing doubts, especially after the invasion of Czechoslovakia, and letters from home reflected the nervousness of the English without transmitting the inner certainty that war was inevitable which intelligent people in Europe were beginning to entertain. We continued to scout the idea. When there was talk of the Japanese handing Tsingtao to the Germans, we uproariously elected a visiting German as Mayor of Tsingtao. Czarnetski was a favourite with the ratings on the *Sandpiper*, with whom he gladly shared his last bottles of beer. It still seemed incredible when one evening on the radio at the Yale Mission we heard of the invasion of Poland, and next day we were all sitting in the garden of the Club, hoping against hope, when a man came over from the gunboat with a message. The stunned silence was

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broken by one of the Germans ; he had fought four years in the last war, and his aged mother was in Kiel. He said " What a crime ".

Indeed our first reaction was of disgust that the people of Europe could not manage things better. The guilt was not quite so obviously on one side at that time as it has since become. Thereafter, I suppose, we went through the same mental experiences as many others during those days. Neither the German Air Force nor the French Army seemed as deadly as we expected. We were short of news, though the Standard Oil installation manager wrote down what he could catch on his battery wireless set and circulated it amongst the community. We gradually got accustomed to war as a background, and in a few weeks we had immediate worries of our own to distract us. The Japanese were again on the move.

" For the second time in the lives of most of us " . . . a second war in just over two years seemed a bit too much ; we began to be tired of it all. In September and October there was a series of preliminary battles, as a result of which the Japanese crossed a strategic river south of Yochow, and captured important road points west of Nanchang, to our east. In the south they were advancing north from Canton, and a landing at Pakhoi was imminent, to be aimed at Nanning to the south-west. The military began to evacuate the city in real earnest this time, and the river was quickly covered with junks and sampans crammed with their sad cargoes of refugees. The Chinese had a gun on top of Yo Lo Shan which sometimes used to lob shells into the river between the two installations, but now it was silent, hauled away to the rear. Through various semi-official channels we learned that the Chinese really expected to lose Changsha this time, though they would " fight to the last " — a phrase which was not too convincing after the justifiable but inglorious withdrawals at Nanking, Canton and Hankow. Hundreds of coolies were demolishing the airfield, pausing from time to time to take cover while the Japanese Air Force blasted it with bombs. This was the only instance of whole-hearted Sino-Japanese co-operation I ever saw. One October afternoon the captain of H.M.S. *Sandpiper*, acting on information received from official sources in his capacity as senior naval officer, instructed British subjects in the city and

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on the island to evacuate to the installations before nightfall or remain at their own risk.

Luckily I had at my disposal, besides two steel lighters containing some two hundred tons of factory materials for Hankow, salvaged from the railway by Maurice after the *débâcles* at Hankow and Canton, a big wooden lighter or barge. Into this I began to load the more mobile pieces of furniture from the house, and the limited office equipment that I had been using. I also managed to rescue the billiard table from the Club. The difficulty of course was man-power, the city having been evacuated, but I finally managed to get together a dozen or so coolies, and a petty officer from the gunboat supervised the dismantling. I doubt if it would be possible anywhere except in China, in that hour of panic, with enemy aircraft overhead and no machinery or vehicle available whatever, to transport a full-sized billiard table over half a mile of sand, across a long gang-plank, finally into a boat, without its sustaining even a scratch. Two brave coolies volunteered to remain, one at the house and the other at the office, to guard against casual looting till the last moment. We posted up notices with English, Chinese and Japanese text, proclaiming the neutral nature of the properties, and as night fell cast off from the jetty and began to go slowly downstream to our refuge.

There was plenty of room for the reduced island community, especially as the Commissioner of Customs elected to remain in his residence, as did Heinrichsohn at the other end of the island. There was room in the various lighters for the skeleton Chinese staffs most of us had retained, and the Greek steamer swung crookedly at anchor, crippled but afloat. The gunboat rode in the midst of our beflagged concentration of shipping, the S.N.O. in absolute command of the British community and all its dependants. We were as ready as we could be for the events that were to come. Vernon, my friend and host, slept on the verandah. I slept in his bedroom. We were both tired after the day's difficulties and we slept soundly until, at 2 A.M., we were almost lifted from our beds by a tremendous explosion. It was immense; it rocked the house to its foundations; curiously, we both seemed to be aware for a measurable moment of time of what was to come — as if time itself was suspended for an instant by the fury of the cataclysm — before the blast

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and shattering noise communicated themselves to our senses. Two shaken men, with hearts beating furiously, we sprang to the balcony and looked out over the river. Not a ray of light was to be seen except the dim riding-lights of the hulks, not a sound audible but the creak and splash of fenders and restricted waters, which rather emphasised the silence, as if the very night had nerved itself to listen. When we spoke it was in whispers. We strained our eyes to the north, where the enemy was nearest, but saw only more darkness. No soldier shouted, no alarm bells rang, no gun was fired. The noise, which seemed still all round us, was gradually swallowed up in the gloom, and presently we went back to bed. Vernon was asleep first, and like the grooms in Duncan's bedchamber, he cried "Murder" in his sleep. We were both wide awake for a searing second before we heard the second detonation, this time at dawn. There was no more sleeping to be done that night, so we arose and bathed and set out to ask questions.

In the *Sandpiper* we found a very angry captain. He had been woken up in the night by a Chinese naval officer who had informed him, in good Dartmouth English, that he had been laying mines in the river. He had laid them downstream and up; they were anchored, yes, but one had better be careful. No, he had not charted them; the Japanese would be up in a day or two, so why bother? Good-night. So the gunboat was a prisoner, and at any moment one of these hastily and haphazardly laid mines might come drifting down among our concentration of shipping. It was not surprising that the skipper was displeased. The explosions we had heard had been caused by sampans loaded with refugees. The first one had contained twenty-two men and women, of whom one had survived, to be promptly put under arrest for sabotaging the war effort. Of the second there were no survivors, so nobody knew how many were lost. In the calm of the early morning we could see the horrid engines scattered over the stream, like black beetles, their four horns, menacing as the horns of the devil himself, bobbing evilly above the surface. The river was rising however, and the wind got up, and presently they were no longer visible from afar. As we were beginning our lunch we saw a fine big junk sailing towards us from the north before a fair breeze. The great sail was well filled, and the waters were

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slapping and creaming at her bows. We held our breath. Soldiers on the shore opened fire with their rifles to try to indicate the danger to the captain, but he never understood, but held his course. Then she struck. The air was full of flying fragments, and seconds, it seemed, after they had all subsided the helmsman reached the peak of his ascent at sixty feet and began, twisting and turning ridiculously, to fall. The splash when he hit was hardly noticeable in the choppy water : a sight memorable but scarcely appetising. During the next day or two we periodically heard explosions in the distance, but we did not see any more mines go up ourselves.

The S.N.O. was full of energy. Not without difficulty we constructed a boom which we hoped would ward off drifting mines from the shipping. The Chinese had placed a machine-gun post on the foreshore just beside the installation, which was obviously embarrassing and would give the Japanese an excuse to be most unpleasant if they chose, so the captain set out in search of the general. He had a long and hot walk, and when he finally reached headquarters he was not in a mood to be trifled with. He had with him an interpreter, the No. 1 Chinese of Butterfield and Swire, who was an intelligent and well-educated man. The conversation went somewhat on these lines.

"Tell the general that I have had a hell of a time finding his bloody headquarters."

"The captain says, it is very good of the general to receive him at such a busy time."

"Tell him he's got to do something about this machine-gun post, and do it quick."

"The captain wishes to ask a great favour ; it seems that a certain machine-gun post, etc. etc."

"Tell him that if it is not removed by tonight I shall drop a brick on it."

"The captain says he quite appreciates the exigencies of defence but on the other hand the international position, etc. etc."

"And tell him I shall radio Hankow and give the Japs the exact position."

"So the captain says, if the general would very kindly oblige . . ."

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Tea was drunk all round, goodwill prevailed, and the gun post was moved to a respectable distance downstream. The captain said afterwards, "A good fellow, Li, but I'm not sure that he always interpreted exactly what I said."

That day we were given to understand that the Japanese were about fifteen miles away to the north-east. A number of aircraft flew over and one section detached itself and dived over us. When we got up we decided they had just been having a look, but it was a nasty moment. Our main worry in those last hours was on behalf of our Chinese. Vernon had wisely insisted on taking no women into the installation, and those Chinese who still had wives with them had sent them away into the country to the west; but the question was, if the Japanese insisted, whether we could deny them access to the Chinese servants, crews and other employees who had so loyally remained with us to the last. There was nothing more we could do about it, but it was a problem which called up unhappy visions, and I think we all worried about it a good deal.

Next day some of us went to the city by motor launch. It was a nervous journey, because though the mines were visible again, and we expected to be safe if we hugged the bank, one could not be quite sure. Moreover, the city was being bombed from time to time, and the soldiers along the banks were in a nervous mood, liable to shoot at anything. However, we arrived without incident, and found the city, this time, utterly and absolutely deserted. Sentries posted at the main intersections were truculent, but we avoided them by going through the back streets. Our office was in good shape but the watchman had departed. The soldiers had taken exception to the Japanese writing on the notice on the door, and threatened to shoot him as a traitor — it is difficult to provide for everything. Over on the island all was quiet; the coolie at our house had brewed himself a great bin of spirit, and was as happy as a king. The Commissioner was glad to see us, and we did not like leaving him there alone; but the tradition of the foreigners in the Chinese Customs was a fine one, and he never considered leaving for a moment. We had heard, incidentally, that the Commissioner at Canton had sat alone in his empty Customs House and told the whole Japanese Army to go to hell. One

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or two soldiers fired at us vaguely as we sped downstream at dusk.

Much the same thing happened the next day and the next. On this alarm I had betted in favour of the Japanese, perhaps because the dreary months of futility had dulled the edge of my optimism, but as the days passed, stretching out to a week, and still nothing happened, I began to worry about my money. Every morning we strained our eyes to the north, and there saw nothing. The Japanese had already announced to the world that Changsha was in their hands, so it was obvious that they were determined to get there this time. Time hung heavily on our hands. We played dice. Somebody produced some bamboo bows, and we attempted archery. We were even reduced to that most desperate of China games, lizards : there is always a little house lizard on the ceiling, on the hunt for flies, and as he prowls around in short rushes, he stops always with one or the other of his forefeet advanced. The competitors lie on the floor, one taking the left foot, the other the right, and the appropriate foot placed forward each time wins its backer a dollar. Up in the city the troops were getting very fidgety. One sentry put a tommy-gun burst through the thigh of an old woman who did not understand his challenge.

It is impossible to define in detail the rebirth of confidence after a period of alarm. First we became accustomed to a state of emergency, then we suddenly realised it did not exist any more. No retreating Chinese appeared. There were civilian fugitives, some with unpleasant stories to relate — those who had remained quietly in their villages expecting that the Japanese would respect their helplessness were horribly disillusioned — but there was no sign of a general retreat. On the contrary, rumours of a great Chinese victory, vague and faint at first but growing in detail and weight, began to trickle in. Two weeks after the evacuation I obtained permission " at my own risk " from the S.N.O., borrowed a tug and returned with my household goods to the island.

We never discovered what really happened. My own theory, which is really only a guess, is this. The Japanese had so far built up their forces in the area that the Chinese High Command decided that they could not maintain their present lines. They determined, in accordance with their policy ever

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since the battle of Shanghai, not to risk a pitched battle but to withdraw behind Changsha and lengthen the enemy's communications till he was so far thinned out as to permit of a successful counter-attack. I know for a fact that the Chinese general in command of the sector had withdrawn with his staff at least as far as Hengyang, a hundred miles to the south. The Japanese, with their excellent espionage system, knew about the plan, and accordingly, when they began their advance, took the risk of prematurely announcing that they had captured their objective. Perhaps in their confidence they neglected elementary precautions. Perhaps there was a Nelson among the loyal Chinese commanders. Anyway, contrary to the intentions of the High Command on both sides, a bitter battle ensued and thousands of Japanese were killed ; the Chinese general hastened forward to take his curtain and a victory was celebrated all over China. And we were doomed to resume our dreary vigil.

In November the Company decided I had been doing nothing long enough, and arranged for my relief. I was greatly excited at this prospect, and passed my last few weeks in a happy frame of mind that must have been an occasional annoyance to my colleagues who were remaining behind. For some reason we had all begun to grow beards when the war began, and had decided that a prize should be awarded to the wearer of the best beard by Christmas. We were thus a sinister body of men. I got off to a good start, and was the first to be evenly covered with a thick red growth, but it never reached any great length and I was gradually overhauled by some of the others. There was a fine variety of styles. The Customs went for the Mephistophelean touch, with a pointed beard on the chin only and a villainous upcurled moustache. Butterfield and Swire had a goatee. The Navy was of course more straightforward, deep and crisp and even, except for the Doctor, who had some bare patches and looked quite horrible. The favourite was old Heinie, who had a magnificent white fluffy creation on Father Christmas lines. As I was now out of the contest I shaved mine off, and otherwise began to get ready to meet civilisation.

Poor Changsha began to recover yet again. People trickled back, then the trickle increased to a flow. Shops and restaurants

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opened up, and commodities were fairly plentiful except for salt, shortage of which caused minor riots. Mails began to arrive again. My letters came by sea to Hongkong, by air to Kweilin, train to Hengyang and finally down-river by launch : the Chinese Post Office is a magnificent institution, and never let us down, even when it was operating under appalling difficulties. But before the normal life of the province could be resumed something had to be done about the mines.

The enterprising naval officer and his crews had sown over six hundred mines between Siangtan, thirty miles upstream from Changsha, and Siangyin, the same distance to the north. Nobody knew exactly where they were, as they had been sown at night and in haste. Launches were creeping up and down the upper stretch of river, riding safely over the mines when the water was high and picking their way between them when it was low, but the lower stretch was still considered impassable. The people waited for a while, hoping that the Government would take steps, but nothing was done, and meanwhile an ever-increasing concentration of junks, laden with the grain from the Lake and all kinds of merchandise from Szechwan, was accumulating at Siangyin. The merchants and junk-men finally requested permission of the military to make the journey as best they might, and were told that they could proceed at their own risk.

One unforgettable November day, while the sun shone bravely and a strong breeze blew steadily from the north, twelve hundred skippers of twelve hundred junks hoisted their sails, upped anchor and steered out into the stream. They did not falter or hang back ; rather it developed into a race, each eager to be the first to brave the lurking danger of the waters. Soon one junk hit a mine and disintegrated with a frightful detonation, then another, but the fleet came charging on. Altogether fifteen went in fragments to the bottom, but the great majority came safely, irresistibly to harbour. This was an important occasion, both intrinsically and by implication. I suppose that numerically this was the biggest concentration of sailing craft seen since the Greeks routed the Persian fleet at Salamis twenty-four hundred years ago. The expedition meant the resumption of inter-port trade that is so great a part of the life of China, but I thought the inner significance even more

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important. It symbolised the way things get done by China ; suddenly, ruthlessly, unanimously, in overwhelming force. There was no premeditation or co-ordination, just a pressure building up till something had to give way, and as irresistibly as the water flowing beneath them the thousand ships came to Changsha. And that was not all. Most of them were going further upstream, but all must stop at the Changsha Customs House to pay Inter-port Duty on their cargoes. The Customs had no soldiers with rifles to enforce the law, and indeed the sailors who had faced the minefields were not likely to be checked by mere muskets. The Customs Marshal stood on the foreshore and shouted, and as he reached the appropriate point every junk-master dropped his sail and turned in to comply with the law.

I am glad this happened before I left Hunan. In my long months of association with destruction and defeat and flight, in the presence of destitution and suffering and unchecked disease, I had lost sight of the underlying vitality of China that had struck me so forcibly in the first years. One day, I feel, China will shrug her vast shoulders : there will be wounds, but the burden of Japan will be flung to the winds. And as long as the watermen of China put in to pay their taxes without compulsion, because it is the law, we may be sure she will not abuse her victory.

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IN time one can look back with nostalgia at almost anything. Any set of circumstances which has so coloured one's life as to become a memorable part of one's past is apt to be the subject of occasional affectionate recollection, as the selective properties of the subconscious gradually touch up the highlights and blur the intervals of ennui or depression ; but strain or cajole my memory as I may, I can find nothing in that year in Changsha to mitigate the dreary useless ache that it was to me and to the others in our community. We had half of everything — shops with no goods, leisure with no interests, tennis rackets with no strings, moonlight and no poetry ; we saw too little of those we liked, and too much of those we did not, and far, far too much of ourselves. At the bottom of all our distress was the distress of the Chinese. We were living in a suicided city, among people hunted and weary and on the edge of despair, so that for once we could not look to the Chinese for help or draw from them resources of the vitality of which enforced idleness had drained our systems.

Maurice arrived early in December with my successor, Gordon. They came by car from Indo-China via Nanning ; they travelled hastily and by night, for the Japanese had landed at Pakhoi, and behind the car the army was closing in. Nanning fell only a few hours after they sped through its deserted streets, and one more of China's vital gates had closed, like a portcullis, with a clang. They left the car at Hengyang and came on by launch, and uncommonly glad I was to see them. We did not waste much time on handing over the empty office, on greetings or farewells, and two days later on a wintry dawn Maurice and I embarked in the wooden lighter which, attached to a steam launch of incalculable age and indescribable decrepitude, was to carry us upstream through the uncharted minefields to Hengyang.

It was not a particularly enjoyable journey. Apart from

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the chance of hitting a mine, it was always possible that the launch would explode spontaneously as another had recently done, not having had an engine-overhaul for many years. However, I had just acquired a shocking cold, and my mind was far more taken up with my physical miseries in the unheated lighter than with potential disintegration from external reasons, and this counter-irritant at least kept me from fear. At Hengyang we came to the same old station waggon, re-fitted and re-tyred in Hanoi, and set out straightway for the west whence I had come. The road to Changteh had been demolished, but there was an alternative route running south-west to Paoking, then swinging northwards to Hungkiang and joining the older road on the border of Kweichow province. Having no alternative, this was the road we took.

Our journey was uneventful. It was not particularly comfortable, as the dust was very bad and there was no good accommodation or food at our night stops. Maurice had brought a blessed bottle of gin, to which we helped ourselves in strictly rationed quantities at midday and in the evening, and it revived our spirits amazingly. We reached Kweiyang on the third day, and spent the fourth night at Anshun. Here we visited a Mission doctor, and found an interesting *ménage*. The doctor was a polite and friendly, overworked American of middle age. His wife, who acted as matron in the hospital, struck me as being rather a bitter woman — it was she who told us about the high prices they had paid for goods originally presented to China by the fund headed by the Lord Mayor of London. The third member of the household was a pretty little Russian girl, brown as a berry and of uncertain age. As an infant she had been adopted from an orphanage in Harbin by a Chinese officer of good family. This officer, moving round all North China as his military duties demanded, had somehow managed to bring his little protégée with him until finally, when he was stationed at Kweichow, the girl had had trouble with other women of the captain's household, run away and taken refuge with the missionaries. She spoke perfect, sonorous Mandarin, not a word of any other language, and could neither read nor write. She thought she was twelve, but one imagined she was considerably older — fifteen or sixteen at least. The Christian religion of course meant nothing to her, and I

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wondered how she would eventually react to the austerity of the household she had adopted. One day I hope to hear what the kind couple eventually made of their problem child.

From here on the dust was very bad, and when we pulled up for the night at an inn just inside Yunnan province we were coated with white powder, and our eyes, mouths and, above all, our noses were quite choked with it. As usual in Yunnan there was a great hubbub all night, with all the other guests either drinking or smoking opium. Yunnan was the only province I visited where no attempt was made to suppress smoking — no doubt the sinister Mr. Miao made a nice sum of money out of opium as he did out of every other commodity in Yunnan — and many smokers from neighbouring provinces came over the border to enjoy it. So Maurice and I had a bad night and were very tired, as well as dirtier than we had ever been in our lives, when we nosed our way through the familiar, cattle-filled streets of Yunnanfu and plunged into the hotel for a bath.

We had to book two days ahead for the rail journey down to Hanoi. In the interim I encountered a young Chinese who had been at my college at Cambridge, where I had grown prematurely old trying to teach him to steer an eight up and down the Cam. It is always an occasion in China when old friends meet — indeed nothing is more charming than the smile of genuine delight with which any Chinese will greet one after a separation ; and the reunion of two old students of a foreign University could not be allowed to pass uncelebrated. We duly dined together, and he told me of his career ; he had studied Engineering at Cambridge, and had subsequently worked with an assiduity characteristic of his race (not of ours) in the machine shops of big motor firms. Now he was about to open a business of his own in China, in which he expected in a few years to make a fortune. It was instructive to note that after a University education in England, the Englishman expects to earn a modest living, the Chinese, on returning to his country, to become rapidly rich.

The building of the railway was a feat worthy of the French engineers who have made so many striking additions to world communications. All the first day and most of the second we rumbled down the steep track, twisting dizzily, dodging in and

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out of tunnels, seeing the track above or below us in a dozen places at once as it leapt, chamois-like, from crag to crag, or crept, serpentine, out of one hole and into another. Our compartment we shared with a Dane who was so British in his demeanour that we did not speak to him at all until the second day, when a waiter broke the ice by upsetting a dish of peas all over the floor. We all suffered from the occasional visits of an elderly British missionary from the second class. He was a sterling character ; he had come from his mission in the far North-West, and told interesting stories of Russian influence in that region ; but he had an unseemly passion for problems that quite outweighed his virtue as a preacher or pioneer. He would come bounding in with the cry, " You want a problem ! I'll give you one ! " and before we could deny any desire for anything of the sort, he had whipped out a pencil and paper, or half a dozen matches, and was deep in the intricacies of " If a man starts walking at four miles an hour . . ." or " Take two matches away and leave more than before ". The train did not travel at night, it being considered too dangerous, and we put up at two horrid little hotels where the accommodation was dirty, the food bad and the prices extortionate. A minor accident held up the train in front of us for two hours, by which time it was impossible to complete the next stage in daylight, so the whole system was delayed for twenty-four hours and we spent an extra night at one of the hotels. The procedure at the Indo-China frontier was uncomfortable and trying, and we were searchingly interviewed by the French authorities as experts on Chinese affairs. The missionary was taken away to be interviewed by very important officials, which was gratifying to his pride but caused him to miss the train ; we hoped he would torment the officials with his interminable problems, in case they had not enough of their own. We finally chugged into Hanoi on the evening of the eleventh day from Changsha, and Maurice, eager to rejoin his family for Christmas, dashed off early next morning to catch a steamer at Haiphong.

I waited for the next ship, due to leave in three days' time, though in the end I waited six. I spent one night in Haiphong, now more than ever, since the fall of Nanning, crammed with war goods for China — mostly, as it turned out in the end, for Japan. It is an inferior little town, its one mediocre hotel

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packed with desperate transshipping men from all countries, and the only pleasant recollection I have is of a cabaret into which I wandered to drink a glass of beer and kill an hour of the evening. During my period of exile certain peculiar dances had found their way on to the floors of the world, amongst them one called the "Lambeth Walk", another called the "Palais Glide". It struck me at once that these sequences were sure of success, being particularly suited to those with no gift for dancing, but the little Annamite taxi-girls were all in favour. As usual at such establishments, the girls who were not engaged during the first few bars of music would come out on to the floor and dance with one another, out of a genuine fondness for dancing or for purposes of advertisement. There was something very touching about the sight of four little Annamite girls, in their native garb but in unsafe foreign shoes, shapely arm in shapely arm, bobbing meticulously through the steps of the Palais Glide with pretty brown faces set in expressions of the most intense concentration.

My ship, the *Tai Seun Hong*, was a ship with a history. She was built by the Germans in the last war, taken over by the British afterwards, later sold to the French, now chartered again by the British. The passengers were two business men, one Chinese and one British, forty buffaloes, two hundred and thirty pigs (in pokes), several hundred assorted head of poultry, and myself. It was warm and sunny in Haiphong, even in December, and the various animals, especially the buffaloes, were conspicuously deficient in house-training. Altogether it was a smelly voyage; even the gin smelled of eau-de-cologne, as did the French captain, who was, however, a genial fellow and gave the human passengers champagne at three o'clock in the afternoon. The whole ship was newly painted with grey-blue paint, and walking along the narrow decks while the ship heeled to the south-east breeze I invariably collected some of this paint on my person — thereby unwillingly following the example of the Ancient Britons in times of national emergency. As the only pair of trousers I possessed was already perforated in two vital places, it was a singularly ill-found traveller who stepped from a launch on to the quay at Hongkong on the morning of the sixth day.

Hongkong looked as lovely as ever. The ships were not

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quite so gay, all the ocean-going craft having gone grey, and there were guns on some of their sterns. I received a friendly reception from the manager at Hongkong, in spite of being seven days late, so decided to treat myself to a holiday — the first for nearly four years. I filled in forms and collected the necessary visa in a hurry, and by the following dawn was at Kai Tak aerodrome embarking in a Pan-American Clipper. My old friend and fellow oarsman from Canton had been transferred by his company to Manila, and had invited me to spend the preceding Christmas with him there. That had not been possible, but what is a year between friends? The Clipper was a mighty machine. I reclined in a bunk, and they brought me tea, then sandwiches, then beer. When I arose there were light refreshments and buffet lunch in the lounge, so the passengers were kept happy until after about five hours the distant blue sparkle of the sea gave way to the vivid green of forest and jungle and soon we hissed smoothly in to the naval anchorage at Cavite.

In the car which drove us in to Manila I made the acquaintance of Betty. Betty was the embodiment of the dreams dreamed by exiled British youth in all the remote and lonely reaches of the world. She was young, very pretty, excellently dressed and capable of the most dazzling smiles; I was immediately captivated, and under the benevolent smile of her mother a friendship began which had quite an influence on the next part of my life. At the Manila Hotel I found a rather surprised John. Since issuing his invitation he had married and reproduced, but, hospitable as ever, he took me back to his nice house in a suburb and his kind wife at once made me at home.

In the following days I flung myself into the atmosphere of Manila with the rapture I have since known in throwing myself into the crystal Mediterranean after a walk across a few miles of desert during the khamsin. There was everything I had felt starved of for so long. There was greenness and abundance; at the Polo Club there was a great sheet of grass, and real full-sized horses dashing heroically after a little white ball. There were taxis with polite drivers who called one "sir". There were bars with abundant Scotch whisky and iced beer. The streets were like a summer flower-bed, ablaze with human

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colour. The Filipino women wore dresses whose prototypes were conceived in Spain, elegant and vivid and often alluring, while the men often had a splash of colour in a scarf or cummerbund to enliven their thin foreign-style suits. Amongst the flashing American automobiles countless two- and four-wheeled carriages threaded their way, their timbers gaily painted and their horses bedecked with coloured straws. In the background was the azure sea, the roads had grassy margins, barrows of fruits and vegetables lined the streets, the shops were full of Christmas merchandise. Everything was expensive — Manila is one of the most costly places to live in that I know — but I had saved enough in my exile to look after that for at least a little while, and positively exulted in the intoxicating pastime of spending.

The first evening John took me down to the Boat Club. The smell of boat clubs is the same the world over, compounded of stale sweat and varnish and river mud, and like the smells of churches and railway stations, it provides a touch of continuity to the most inconsequent of lives. Rowing at Manila was rather exciting. I took out a skiff that day, just as it was growing dark (they always row at night in Manila), and with hands clumsy from lack of practice I launched myself upon the black water. The stream was running very fast, and as a result of a recent flood, whole islands of uprooted weeds were whirling and spinning down with the current, no small obstacle to safe navigation. The scene was eminently tropical : in place of the stunted willows of English rivers, banana fronds and palms and heavy jungle vegetation walled the banks, full of mystery as the darkness closed in. Incongruously, yet adding to the spell, every now and again the strains of wireless music drifted to me from beyond the barrier of foliage ; tangos and rumbas and all the heady music of glamorous Spain. I went out regularly after this, sometimes alone, sometimes with John and his friends in a four, and once or twice I went to a house downstream where the adorable Betty would come down and greet me on the lawn. I met lots of people. I was surprised to find not only Americans but many British people, solid citizens such as lawyers, brokers and bankers. Betty introduced me to her young friends, including ravishing Spanish girls with lovely names, Adoracion and Conchia and Pilar — very rich,

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some of them, and so beautiful. Some were reputed to have Filipino blood in their ancestry, but I could not see that it mattered very much. And I was mildly surprised to find, among pure-blooded Spaniards, delightful and cultured young men who had fought in what I regarded as the "wrong" side, the victorious side, in the civil war, and who told me something of their own point of view in that conflict. So I rowed and drank and danced through Christmas and the New Year, and the time of my departure drew near; but in all this frivolity I had not neglected to find things out about Manila.

In the Philippine Islands the Americans have made their only experiment in Empire on a big scale. At the beginning we may presume that they were surprised, after the fiasco of the battle of Manila Bay, at the Imperial plum which dropped suddenly into their laps. Other great powers have had the same experience. They were lucky in finding the job of exploitation, and local Westernisation, already well begun, as the old walled city of Manila, with its extensive monasteries and hostels and the cathedral seven times destroyed by earthquakes and seven times restored, and the extensive copra and sugar plantations, bore eloquent witness. The American effort in Manila was from the first dynamic and ambitious; one of the first things that they did was to import several hundreds of school teachers, who promptly scattered themselves over the islands and began to instruct the more malleable tribes in the English language and American ideas. This emphasis on education was the more notable because other Imperial powers had been conspicuously backward in this respect, whether from apathy or policy it is not my business to consider. This policy bore fruit with remarkable speed. In the cities a large percentage of the population was soon bilingual, or, where they had spoken Spanish before, trilingual, and though in the country the process was naturally slower, my travelling friends told me that if they got lost up country they would look to the children for interpreters, showing that the good work was still developing and expanding. With language and education came national consciousness and the idea of emancipation.

It ill becomes one engaged in the armed forces of the United Nations to scout the idea of freedom. It is, however, evident that politically Freedom is dynamite, and much blood has been

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shed in its name ; and because it is a war-cry which rouses a response in every human heart, it is gravely susceptible of abuse. Many peoples are prepared, for the sake of an abstract political freedom, to eschew the other freedoms of the Atlantic Charter, and even to assume a heavier yoke under a different name : which usually smells as bad. The Filipinos decided that they wanted independence, and the Americans, having felt the same themselves and being an idealistic people behind their hard-boiled industrial façade, were eager to give it to them, especially as they had as their leader and spokesman a man who was evidently capable of holding them together and running them as a nation. President Quezon is extremely tough and extremely capable, and dominates his electors as grimly and securely as any absolute monarch or dictator rules his subjects. Doubtless he has used "freedom" to help him to power, but he has already demonstrated his ability to sustain his responsibilities. He has hitherto had at least some of the advantages of a leader of opposition, but there is every reason to suppose that when the Americans finally withdraw, as they are pledged to withdraw, from Philippine internal affairs, he will prove equal to the task of governing the Filipinos with firmness and continuity, not perhaps in their way, not quite in the American way, but at least in his. What happens after him is another question, but almost every country in the world, at the moment, is dependent on one man to a degree that is historically absurd.

Thus the Americans in 1939-40 found themselves, as a result partly of their own liberality and partly of work done before them, withdrawing from their empire almost before they knew they had one. The Filipinos, as I have said, are an attractive people, good-looking and intelligent and polite, and the humility which elsewhere infects coloured peoples, at least those closely associated as subordinates with white men, seems to have passed them by. Even in never-conquered China the servants and employees of the foreigners have a code of deference to their bosses that they seldom dream of presuming to transgress ; in India and Africa much more so ; but in Manila is no such admission of inferiority. This is the only "coloured" country I know in which white masters find their servants not only borrowing their drinks and cigars, but even their clothes

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and motor cars. Even the most enlightened Imperialists could hardly expect to convert a whole people in a few decades to the ideas of public service and probity which alone make the institutions of democracy workable. The administration of justice was shaky, both in apprehending criminals and in punishing them when apprehended. Filipinos have certain qualities which we associate with children — grace, humour, love of noise, unthinking cruelty and ungoverned tempers, resulting in many murders. Manila Americans were not impressed when a Filipino convicted of stabbing a U.S. sailor to death was sentenced to two years' imprisonment. The judicial system was further hampered by the periodic magnanimity of the President, whose practice it was once or twice a year to celebrate his wife's birthday or other events of national moment by declaring an amnesty and letting loose on the city large numbers of convicts — much, surprisingly enough, to the city's delight. I even went so far as to visit Manila Gaol, and when I remarked the unserviceable state of the electric chair and the cheery demeanour of the occupants of the condemned cell, was told laughingly by the warder, "You see, sir, we never actually execute anybody". There is something very endearing, in these days of death, about a Dictator who treats thieves, murderers and political opponents as naughty children to be put in the corner until they are prepared to be good. I wondered if there were crimes which were not tried by the ordinary courts, executions in dark places which cheated the chair. Local government, as far as I could see, was regarded as a jolly and profitable game. Manila was administered by a body of City Fathers known to the foreigners with dubious affection as "the City Dads". Civic authority always offers easy prizes to the unscrupulous, and Manila is the Wicked Alderman's dream. Almost no public or private enterprise was immune from the depredations of these jolly gentlemen, and the rather cumbersome American judicial procedure, so carefully devised to be an impediment to corruption, had proved here at least to be its ready tool. Juggling with rate assessments, farming of contracts and preposterous exploitation of secret sources of information were among abuses of which I actually heard in detail.

The Americans were on the way out. When a very high

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American official indeed announced that he would vacate his residence in a year's time, his presumptive Filipino successor began building operations in the front garden forthwith, so that everything would be ready for him to move in. But before they left the Americans made a very interesting gesture. While the Philippines were part of America, the United States had given them strong preferential treatment in trade, imposing on goods available in Manila, but coming from other sources, substantial duties on import into the States. Sugar was the most conspicuous example, and in this respect every American was contributing to the wealth of the Philippines. When in 1934 America said she would grant Philippine independence after ten years, she added that of course from that date this preferential treatment would cease. In order to allow Philippine trade to adjust itself, the preferential tariffs would be decreased every year from 1934 by 10 per cent. This is on the face of it a reasonable arrangement ; but already in 1939, half-way to independence, the export trade was feeling the pinch, and it was evident that by 1944, when President Quezon had at last to take over the ultimate responsibilities of sovereign power, his staple export trades would have reached the bottom of ten years' progressive depression. Even then there were some who said "It will never happen, after all" — the growing threat of Japan was at that time another factor inclining the Filipinos to lean on America ; but in the end, in spite of the gallantry and good faith on both sides, the islands fell, and a new start will have to be made, with the Philippines taking their place in the New Order among the smaller states with aspirations to a freedom that they will never be able to defend alone.

My return aeroplane was delayed, and delayed again, and early in the New Year I decided to go back by sea. So having said a fond farewell to my host and hostess and the holiday of a lifetime, and waved good-bye to Betty on the quay ; while I still lean over the rail and watch the other farewells, and the symbolic streamers, that alone now bind the neat Dutch ship and her passengers to the shore, growing taut, breaking and fluttering sadly down into the dock ; I must now apologise if I have misunderstood, in my short visit, or misrepresented this intelligent volatile people which has been the subject of the

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most courageous Imperial experiment in all time.

Manila to Hongkong in s.s. *Tsinegara* took forty-eight hours which passed pleasantly enough. I met two young people on board who were going to Hongkong to get married and have a week's honeymoon. They asked me to be best man ; they were both, I thought, slightly crazy, but very amiable and amusing, so I gladly agreed. We made up a foursome for the Hongkong Hotel the night we arrived. I found the place just the same — I always enjoyed it, in spite of the licensing hours, more than any other hotel in the East. Food was excellent (*Truite Bleue* a speciality) and the floor and band were good. Pink-faced soldiers, sailors and civilians pranced around, that January night in 1940, singing the hymns of complacency current at that time, "Hang out your washing" and "Run, rabbit, run" — I wonder how many of them are alive today? It all seems a very long time ago. Next day the wedding was prosaically performed by the Registrar, followed by a sumptuous breakfast, and on the following dawn I embarked in s.s. *Empress of Asia* to complete my journey to Shanghai.

It was a dreary voyage as the big ship was almost empty. Though the dancers in Hongkong were full of exuberant confidence, the rich American was in no hurry to go world-cruising in British ships, and few people were travelling the seas except strictly on business. It was enlivened by one agreeable incident. On board were the Rear-Admiral of the Yangtse Flotilla, a young business man returning to his post in Yokohama with his wife, and less than a dozen other first-class passengers. I introduced the young wife to the admiral, who was dressed in the traditional grey pin-stripe suit which with green pork-pie hat constituted the off-duty uniform of naval officers of that era, and the following conversation ensued :

YOUNG WIFE : I see you are drinking pink gin : perhaps you are a sea-faring man.

ADMIRAL : Er — yes.

YOUNG WIFE : Are you in the R.N.V.R.?

ADMIRAL : Well, no — not exactly.

YOUNG WIFE : Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself ! My husband is in the R.N.V.R. Where are you going ?

ADMIRAL : To the States, *via* Japan — if the Japanese will let me ashore.

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YOUNG WIFE : Never mind, my husband will fix that ; he knows everybody in Yokohama.

And so on : everybody else present knew what was going on, and it must be admitted that the Great Man took it very well. We were all very sorry for the young wife when she found out afterwards the terrible consequence of the British custom of not listening to names when introduced, but several of us dined out on the story afterwards in Shanghai.

At the moment when we crossed the Indo-China border in December 1939 I turned my back on Free China, after living there for three and a half years, over two being years of war. During those days in the empty *Empress* I had time to review the respective losses and gains of both sides and their prospects for the future. As the ideas I arrived at then did not substantially alter during my remaining year in the Far East, and indeed remain much the same today, I shall record them at this point, for I had reached the close of a chapter.

China has been intelligently described as the " greatest mass of people with a continuous history " in the world. This definition, while conceding the magnitude and permanence of China, denies her the grace of personality, the honour of nationhood. And this is where my intelligent commentator, and perhaps the Japanese, made a mistake. True, the history of China is full of dissension, and treachery and even treason have their place in its pages ; but the very fact of her survival gives the lie to the argument that she is mere multitude without direction. The great mass of the Chinese people have always automatically closed their ranks against any invader from without, and engulfed or repelled him relentlessly in the fullness of time.

If Japan really intended to establish a complete military, political and economic hegemony over the whole of China, which is doubtful, or even if she intended merely to secure for herself immediate access to the more readily available resources of minerals, agricultural produce, labour and military bases which she required for the greater struggle against Europe which she had in mind, it was anyway essential that she should obtain the acquiescence of large elements of the population. Without this she could not hope to succeed. I have already mentioned the tendency of the main conflicting elements of

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modern China, the North, the South and the Communists, to unite in the middle 'thirties. Indeed the movement must be described less as a tendency than as a series of events both sudden, in the perspective of history, and cataclysmic. At one moment the three parties were at loggerheads, with hand on sword-hilt ; at the next, miraculously, they were standing side by side, with swords drawn, facing Japan. The obvious explanation of this change of heart is that the great subconscious mind of China had awoken, just in time, to the fact that she was in danger ; fear and hatred bring strange fellows to the same bed ; but I think there is another reason, more subtle but historically of no less weight.

The Chinese, of all people in the world, have the strongest feeling for monarchy. Individual freedom, subject to a formal acknowledgement of a semi-divine prince, is their ideal of government. When in 1911, as a result of gross internal mismanagement and, significantly, of its failure to uphold the " face " of China against the encroachments of Western and Westernised powers, the monarchy was overthrown and the Imperial palaces were duly emptied of the anointed, China sacrificed something without which she could not fully live. One can imagine a British Empire, if the Royal Family were deposed, its component peoples bickering and even fighting among themselves. Certainly, with the King still securely on his throne, the differences within the Empire have never reached the pitch reached by the contending Chinese interests, but there is a parallel between the way in which, after an epoch of self-seeking and backbiting, the British Empire and the Chinese people, with a unanimity and a determination that their enemies never dreamed of, rallied against the enemy, rallied to the Throne. Of the British, we should say it was a matter of course ; I contend that to the wise observer it should have been no less a matter of course in the Chinese. The moment called for a Leader, a Monarch, a Generalissimo, and the moment produced one. When they found Chiang Kai-shek, the Chinese found the continuity they had lost. May they never lose it again.

If they were fighting a war against China, the Japanese chose in 1937 a date too early, indeed, for their enemy's preparation, but too late for themselves. The skirmish in the

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North and the local operation at Shanghai developed abruptly into a large-scale war. Chiang had been given a mere matter of months for his last preparations, the preparations at length of a united people, and though he had done much, it was not enough, and China was not yet strong enough to hurl the invader from her shores. He was pledged — to the Southerners and to the Communists — to resist the next act of aggression. Military prudence urged early withdrawals, *reculer pour mieux sauter*, but Chiang, with his instinctive appreciation of the deeper-than-military demands of the moment, chose the other road. The few really well-equipped and trained divisions he had, he flung into Shanghai, and there in the embattled ruins of Chapei and Pootung they fell almost to a man. They did not die in vain, for in those bitter, bloody weeks and months of fighting, street by street and house by house, Chiang not only gave an earnest to his new confederates of his loyalty to them — hurling against the enemy his best weapon, which he might have retained for the coercion of his friends — but also gave China time to realise that this time the fight was on. The seeds of unity, determination, hatred and revenge to come were thus planted securely in Chinese soil.

Even in Manchuria and Hopei-Chahar in the North, where the Japanese had been exerting their influence without official Chinese opposition for years, they had never succeeded in getting good-class Chinese to work for them. So much the less could they hope to discover quislings of quality in the newly awoken China of the day. However, the Japanese are no fools, and since Julius Caesar the principle that splitting the opposition is an essential preliminary of empire has been stated in all history books. Up to a point Japanese fifth-column work was successful. Their espionage was first-class, and small traitors were not hard to buy, but the only sign of treachery on a big scale was at Canton, both in the internal disturbances of 1938 and in the ultimate, speedy fall of the city; but that event is obscure to this day and it is doubtful if in that instance treachery seriously affected the course of the war. As the invaders advanced they set up local authorities with Chinese members in the areas they occupied, thus definitely confusing the issue for the more simple-minded of the Chinese; but the men they enlisted were of the poorest material, corrupt,

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depraved, feeble-minded for the most part, and what was worse, from the point of view of their masters, they soon began to be afraid. Assassination is not widely praised as a medium of warfare, but sometimes it works ; nobody on earth will obey or respect an imposed leader who is afraid of him. The Japanese political warfare department was, moreover, not helped by certain operations of the military. If " co-operation " is to be one of your sources of strength, you must obtain it, where you are unable to enforce it, by the gentler arts of conciliation, persuasion and corruption. In 1937 the Japanese Army engaged the Chinese forces, and the Japanese Navy, unable to find any more Chinese Navy or merchant marine than a few fishing-junks, which they promptly sank, thereupon took to the air and engaged the Chinese civilian population behind the lines. Civilian bombing, on a moderate scale, is indeed an excellent test. If the people really have no heart in the war, they may be bombed out of it — this has happened only once, to my knowledge, up to date. If they are people of spirit who value their cause, they emerge from their ordeal strengthened and tempered and very hard. The spasmodic bombing of Canton, and later the systematic obliteration of other South China cities, made the Japanese real creatures, to be feared and hated and killed on sight, to millions of Chinese who had never before taken them very seriously. The Navy Air Force first scattered the dragon's teeth ; the Army, by its barbarous conduct in victory, fostered and cherished them against the day of their flowering. No real pro-Japanese party has ever emerged.

In the economic, as in the political sphere, the Japanese also achieved only a qualified success. The object of true colonisation is for the natives of the mother country to go out and earn their living in the colony. Unfortunately China was already too highly cultivated to absorb any influx of farmers, her farmers too near the starvation line to offer any handsome margin of profit to carpet-bagging landlords, even if any dared to live alone, away from the protection of Japanese arms. After the capture of Hankow, numbers of small Japanese tradesmen and shopkeepers came streaming up the river and opened their little shops and businesses on looted premises. This was a good scheme ; the hand of Japan in the interior

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would be subtly strengthened by the presence of thriving commercial colonies at the population centres, and it would give the impression at home that the war was being won and the Chinese adventure paying a dividend at last. The sponsors of the scheme reckoned without the devastating commercial acumen of the Chinese. I have mentioned already that our dealers in Hankow were selling fifty thousand cigarettes at cost for the sake of the profit obtained by selling the empty case. All went well for a few weeks, but little by little the Chinese shops opened up again. They were never as neat and clean as the Japanese next door, but their prices were lower for the same goods or services. The Japanese could never master the intricate background of credit and interest which enables the Chinese purveyor to sell his goods apparently at a loss, and it cost them, as strangers, more to live ; one by one the shops put up their shutters and the discouraged proprietors took their humble wives and square-fringed, sloe-eyed children on to the next ship for Shanghai. Whether these advertisements of colonial failure ever went back to Japan I do not know. I doubt it.

So much for the retail side. On the wholesale scale, Japan soon had at her feet the areas which produced most of the goods she required of China, a notable exception being wood-oil, the bulk of which was still out of her reach. Japanese currency, the Federal Reserve Bank notes, had displaced the Chinese dollar in the North, so that Japan could pay for Chinese goods and services in her own paper. The only snag was that if she exported goods to China she received only her own paper in payment, and was no better off in respect of the foreign exchange with which she was buying copiously from the Americans and British Empire the materials she was later to use against them. The Army could organise vast foraging expeditions, extracting food from the farmers at the point of the bayonet, but by the time the Army had filled its own stomach there was not much over for hungry, rationed Japan. Broadly speaking, Japan was at this time drawing as much from China as before hostilities, and paying the same price plus the maintenance in clothing, equipment and pay of about one million soldiers.

Strategically, Japan was well placed. She held all the ports she considered worth-while, and had troops far in the interior

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covering her occupation of the coast. She was in a position to menace directly Hongkong, Indo-China and Russia. Her enemies in Europe were fighting madly among themselves. She was holding China, as we now see, with one hand, but that hand was definitely full. I observed at that time that the front was so stretched and the Japanese armies so widely employed that for a general advance of another hundred miles they would need double the present number of men. Now the other hand is filling too. On paper, Japan might appear to have achieved all her immediate objects in her war against Europe, but China is her great failure ; instead of first using Chinese to conquer Chinese, then Chinese to conquer the Westerners, she has had to keep many hundreds of thousands of good troops to hold the very heart of her new empire in a state of armed subjection.

China suffers terribly — not so much in the loss of her industrial equipment, which can be replaced, as in the set-back in civil development, education and enlightenment. Millions of Chinese are homeless, millions of children have never been to school. Millions are dead. The best one can say, and it is poor consolation, is that China can Take It. I think the talk of development of the South-West, the migration of industry and so on is greatly exaggerated : migrations, admittedly, have occurred, but they are of a temporary nature, and there is no occasion to think that after the war either farmer or industrialist will not drift back to areas where fertility and communications offer their respective functions a better prospect than Yunnan, Kwangsi and Kweichow. Still, Chinese are discovering China, and China has discovered her soul.

With such and like reflections I beguiled the luxurious tedium of the empty ship. As we turned into the Whangpoo, and I saw again the neon signs in the rice fields that had first caught my eye nearly four years before, I decided that those years had not been wasted, but that I had emerged sadder and wiser. Perhaps the sadness I had gleaned was greater than the wisdom.

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SHANGHAI has been given many names, ranging from "The Paris of the East" to "The Whore of Asia", but admirers and detractors would at least agree that Shanghai is not China. Hitherto China has been the main theme of this narration, and it is a more worthy theme than Shanghai, but one can hardly complete even so superficial a study of a country as this without describing its biggest city.

Two things, first and last, impressed me about Shanghai more than any others. The first is the restlessness and volatility of its inhabitants, a hum of life being lived twenty-four hours a day, shared equally by Chinese and foreigner — an urge to be up and doing, a constant challenge, so immediate in its effect that when I first landed in Shanghai I felt it impossible to sit still for ten minutes in my hotel, so lasting that in over eleven months I only once had a solitary dinner at home. The second impression is made by the immense variety concentrated in a small space, variety of race, of education, of colour, of dress, of idea, as it were a hive with a thousand individual and separate cells, each with its own unique atmosphere, yet every cell an integral part of the whole.

The early foreign traders came banging on China's door, and having forced a foot inside, kept it there in spite of acute discomfort and relentless pressure from within. At Hongkong a rock, at Canton a sandbank — at Shanghai a dozen square miles of mud-flat was the only concession the Chinese would make. Whatever one may say of foreigners in the East in general, I doubt if the white races have ever in so short a time produced so much from nothing, or built so seemly an edifice on so flimsy a foundation. As the steamer rolls up the Whangpoo, the passenger sees first fields of rice, then warehouses and shipyards and factories, dirty, squalid yet business-like. At length round a bend he catches his first glimpse of the Shanghai skyline, indented, turreted, imposing, with the seventeen squat

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stories of Broadway Mansions on his right and the length of the Bund stretching away to the left. A launch or lighter takes him to the jetty, and having established himself in a hotel by the simple method of handing the keys of his baggage to the porter who meets the boat, telling him to "see to everything", he is free to explore.

The International Settlement and the French Concession extend inland side by side from their frontage on the northern bank of the river Whangpoo. The Bund proper begins at the joint of the two neighbouring states, and extends down the river-bank to Soochow Creek, which enters the river roughly at right angles from the north. The whole Bund is lined with imposing and important edifices — the mere word "building" is not enough to express these gestures in mortar and stone. At one end is the Shanghai Club, with the longest bar in the world. At the other the buildings of the British Consulate sprawl in their pleasant garden, while a small public garden fills in the corner between river and creek. Between these two monuments to British enterprise are twenty-one buildings of from six to ten floors, banks (presided over, of course, by the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank building), oil companies — the A.P.C. next door to the Club, as usual — consulates and shipping companies. Few of the houses contain only one family. In the flats of the bank, doctors and dentists lurk ; German Government bureaux function in a British house ; Frenchmen do business under a German roof ; and as each national group, whether it lives on the ground floor or in the attic, pushes up a flagpole through the roof, and as each shooting pole blossoms with a flag, the top of the Bund looks like an international flower-bed. Inside the offices the Chinese clerks scribe industriously, the accountants ("shroffs") rattle their abacus with incredible dexterity : the foreign subordinates and cashiers work briskly, preparing sheets of figures for the *taipan* upstairs to conjure with ; the pretty stenographers sleep off their excesses of the night before, and plan their dress for the next evening out. Down in the street, the wide pavement is full of hurrying people. It will be a few minutes before a gap in the trams and motor cars permits you to cross the road, and then you are by the river, with Pootung on the south bank dimly before you, while launches and sampans and junks and steamers of all

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shapes and sizes bob over the choppy waters or ride serenely at anchor. To and fro along the banks speed the indefatigable porters, carrying mighty loads and gasping out their monotonous yet infinitely-varied chants. As so often, the water-front is the most fascinating part of Shanghai, because it is the most genuine, for Shanghai has been the world's fifth largest port.

I put myself into the Park Hotel on this occasion. This is the tallest building in Shanghai, and its twenty-three stories piled on a comparatively narrow basis make it look a veritable skyscraper. In the morning I walked in a snowstorm down Nanking Road, along the Bund, past the Consulate to our office by Soochow Creek. I had always been a little in awe of Head Office, where the great men sit spinning webs and where the secret records are housed which have the life story of every employee in the Company. I found the *taipans*, as indeed I have always found the men at the top, friendly and approachable and willing to listen to anything I could tell them. I was introduced to those I had not already met, and to my job. The Company's opinion was that I had perhaps been rather longer away from the amenities of life than was good (a view I heartily endorsed) and I was to remain in Shanghai temporarily, to learn the methods of Head Office, to look after casual shipments to Free China, and to recover my full sanity if by any chance it should have been impaired. I sat down at a desk opposite Maurice, who knew what had to be done, and set myself to fulfil my appointed programme. When my temporary stay ended, having extended from January 12 to November 27, 1940, I knew a lot about the personal and mechanical functions of the Company, but I am not sure that my sanity was any less open to doubt.

The Japanese had by this time occupied a great wedge of China to the north-east ; they dominated eight hundred miles of Yangtse, to no great depth, generally, into the surrounding country, except in Kiangsi where their troops had wandered southwards as far as Nanchang ; they held the coast north of Shanghai pretty firmly, and to the south they had the major ports — Amoy, Swatow, Canton, Pakhoi. My Company was already doing a limited business under difficulties in Hankow — in spite of repeated promises the river was never again laid open to foreign shipping — and in the Japanese areas to the

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north, and in Shanghai and its environs, a very flourishing trade, limited only by the difficulty of obtaining supplies of raw materials. So far, so good ; but as I already had reason to know, direct shipments to Free China, being now restricted to the Indo-China and Yunnan railway, had virtually ceased, and there was a grave danger that, apart from the immediate loss of a market (this did not really matter as we could, anyway, sell all we could make), we should suffer the loss of our goodwill and the collapse through malnutrition of our organisation, both built up over thirty and more arduous years. But it is a close-woven net that can contain the Chinese. Before long our dealers or their representatives began to arrive at Head Office with schemes for shipping cigarettes to their respective territories, and after careful scrutiny some of these schemes were approved. Gradually we extended our operations. Cigarettes for Kiangsi areas not yet occupied were shipped to Ningpo, on the Chekiang coast, in British or neutral ships. When the Japanese blockaded Ningpo, we sent our cigarettes to Wenchow, a little further to the south. Amoy and Foochow were both closed, but ships went to a little port called San-Tu-Ao on the Fukien coast. When Kweichow merchants wanted cigarettes we exported them to British Hongkong, whence they were shipped in hundreds of cases to a previously unheard-of port in Kwangtung, for distribution by lorry, train, wheelbarrow, porter and junk to remote regions in the interior. Finally there were the Honan dealers, from my first training ground, who were taking goods by rail to Nanking, then across the river and into Japanese-controlled trains which ran north-west towards Hsuechow and eventually Chengchow. The cigarettes were off-loaded at a certain station in the western corner of Anhwei province. Hence it was a week's journey by devious routes, up a little river, over a narrow pass, through the Japanese lines into Honan and freedom. These dealers were my most interesting customers, and gave me a lot of trouble. They were taking immense risks, and paying huge costs. They paid tax in Shanghai to the Japanese. They paid high freight to Nanking, after we had with great difficulty obtained the required passes to permit shipment. The second railway was very prone to looting, cigarettes being scarce and a Jap-controlled railway being regarded as fair game for any respectable Chinese robber.

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Eventually "shipper's risk" was the only terms we could get from the railways, which meant "dealer's risk" in this case. The crossing into Free China was hazardous as well as expensive, protection money being payable to both sides, besides illegal provincial taxes and the normal Chinese Consolidated Tax. But the dealers were rich and enterprising men, dealing in exports (mostly of leaf tobacco) as well as these imports, and I really believe they got more fun out of this incredibly difficult and tortuous business than they did in the old days when they had little more to do than sit back and take the money. My one fear was lest, having obtained through my intercession an allotment of cigarettes, these dealers should sell them quietly in the thirsty markets of Shanghai rather than risk the perilous expedition to Honan, thus grievously offending the powerful dealers who had our agency for the local market.

My first weeks in Shanghai were frankly dissipated. There was not really enough work for two, and Maurice was still at hand, though due to leave for Hankow at the first opportunity. I was told not to obtain a flat, as my appointment in Shanghai was only temporary, so after trying the Park Hotel, and the dingy respectability of the Palace Hotel in Nanking Road — suffering the fate of all who live in hotels *en pension*, watching the good food go to the casual visitors while I had to eat "the lunch" or pay extra — I moved into Broadway Mansions, a great ugly chrome-yellow pile on the other side of the creek. Here, in a very airy and up-to-date flatlet, I hung my pictures and unfurled my possessions, installed wireless and gramophone and many flowers, and having at length established a home, proceeded to neglect it. I looked out of the window. It was an excellent Shanghai view. In front of me was the Bund, seen end-on, so that the flags on the roofs were merged into a solid mass of colour. The pleasant green of the British Consulate lay between me and them. To the left the river swirled and heaved, directly below me the overloaded waters of Soochow Creek staggered under their burden of boats. The creek was a fascinating study. Most of the time it was so packed with small craft that it seemed impossible that any should ever move, but presently, when the tide was going the right way, the pack would break up like the ice of a frozen river, and the fragments would mill up and down, colliding with one another, spinning

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helplessly round and round, till at length, miraculously, each boatman was at his destination. Into the creek crept lighters and barges from the big ships anchored in the Whangpoo, and the quays were piled high with cargo. Out of the creek crept the same barges, hours or days later, laden with the manufactures of Shanghai or the surrounding areas — often I saw a great sampan, with water lapping the gunwales, heaped high with ten million cigarettes in cases with our Company's markings. Thousands of men and women lived all their lives on the creek : babies were born there, in the frowsy wells of the sampans, and many people died there, in the boats from natural causes, or in the black waters at night with a brick tied to their necks. It was never quiet on the creek. Every hour of the day and night somebody was on the move, some quarrel was working its exasperating way to a climax of vituperation and then dying down like an unfuelled fire to spasmodic flickering and finally a failing glow of muttered resentment ; some barge was forcing its way through the apparently pathless forest of boats to an assignation with the early tide, and the motion of one craft meant the motion of all in that compact community. They were not restful neighbours, those people of the creek ; but China is not a restful country.

If the view from my window by day was stimulating, by night it was spectacular. The Chinese, with a native genius for pyrotechnics, have taken with joy to electricity and are profuse in spending it. Every architectural eminence has its neon tiara of advertisement, and the flicker of a thousand light-signs resolves into a steady orange glow over the city. Add to this the myriad pin-points from domestic lighting, the headlamps of the cars, the flashes from the trams, the great standard lamps along the Bund, the serried globes and riding lights of the ships, and in season a huge moon beating down on the golden river, and you have some idea of what I saw from my high casement on those January nights. Shanghai beckoned to me, and I went to it.

At first, knowing few people, I went to the cabarets, Casanova, Del Monte, where dozens of blonde Russian girls sit at little tables talking animatedly and with forced gaiety amongst themselves, yet ever with a wary eye for custom. There you buy tickets from the management, so much for a dance, and

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hand them over to your partner for services rendered. If you ask a lady to your table — and it is just possible she may suggest such an arrangement sooner or later — it begins to become expensive. You find out in time that you are paying her by the hour ; drinks are expensive, especially hers, and they go quickly. She gets perhaps half the proceeds of the dance tickets and a percentage of every drink, so she is not likely to discourage your thirst. She may be very lovely, but there is always a wary look on her face, because your money is what she wants. To help you yield it up without pain is the wonderful “ chit ” system of Shanghai, which obtains also in the other Treaty Ports. A drink in your hotel ; a ride in a taxi ; a bottle of champagne ; a new dress suit ; a dinner party for twelve ; a partner for the evening, even a partner for the night — all you are asked to do is to sign your name at the bottom of a chit, with the three initials that show that you belong to a reputable firm, and they are yours. It is a fine system, but is apt to cloud with embarrassment the early days of the following month. The cabarets are for the very lonely or the very rich.

Later, as I enlarged my acquaintance, the scope of my entertainment was widened. One could dine — on roast beef, at the Country Club ; on lobster, at the Park Hotel ; on tournedos and trout at the French Club ; on Wiener Schnitzel and mushrooms tartare at Fiaker's ; on shashlick of mutton with Café Blanc at the Hungarian “ Renaissance ”, on caviar and beef Stroganoff and chicken *à la Kiev* at many, many Russian restaurants. After that were excellent cinemas, and dancing everywhere, at the Park Hotel's roof ballroom high over the top of the world, at the Tower ballroom, at princely Farren's (where you could also play roulette), and at Roxy and Tumble Inn and Blue Lagoon and dozens of others where it was more intimate, each with a special band and a special flavour of its own. I remember Roxy's advertisement, “ This night club will close at 6 A.M. unless requested to remain open by our patrons ”. There was a curfew on the Garden Bridge, on my way home, between 2 and 4 A.M., but it did not bother me very much. It did not take very long, at this rate, for me to lose my first greed for enjoyment, as no physique could stand up to the strain for long : but one seldom woke up in Shanghai feeling really well.

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Naturally, not all the foreign residents of Shanghai spent their nights tearing round the cabarets and their days recuperating. Although I suppose most of the younger people were likely to be out dancing once or twice a week, those who were lucky enough to have a more or less permanent abode there lived a very pleasant life. Prices were rising, but good flats and houses were still obtainable at rates which would be regarded as low elsewhere in the world, and servants were plentiful. Some lucky people had houses with big gardens in Hungjao Road, which is beyond the limits of the International Settlement, and by the kindness of my friends I spent many a Sunday afternoon reclining on grass and squinting up at the flowers — flowers of every kind grow well and rapidly in Shanghai soil, and one could get anything in season, narcissi and primroses, violets, dahlias and chrysanthemums, and gladioli, roses and carnations, for one's table or one's button-hole. But these country dwellers were a privileged few, and for the most part life in Shanghai was town life, with all its amenities and all its restrictions.

Apart from their homes on the one hand and the more hectic relaxations of the night on the other, the foreigners had built themselves handsome clubs, each after the manner of their own nation. The British led the way, with a club for every mood and activity. No. 1, The Bund, with its famous bar, solid English cuisine and long chairs (men only), was for the business man — a pink gin with "The Boys" at noon, a steak and a snooze: few people went there in the evening. The Race Club, obviously, was for the sporting types, and was the headquarters of the Shanghai Light Horse. The Country Club was a family affair — women were admitted except to the bar and verandah — where one played tennis or squash in the late afternoon, and dined before going to the cinema, where children took possession of the swimming-bath and its purlieus on Sunday mornings in the summer. The Hungjao Golf Club was British, and so was the Dome, a club founded by survivors of the R.F.C., where patriotic luncheons were held weekly under the patronage of Sir Victor Sassoon. The amusing feature of this club life was that the same people, chameleon-like, took on the successive characteristics appropriate to their surroundings. In the Shanghai Club one talked shop: at the Race Club one

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was rather dashing, talking about drink and cards and horse-flesh and "good things". At the Country Club one did not normally talk at all, one's intellectual faculties being entirely absorbed by the intricacies of Liar Dice or criticising the tennis or women folk of the more athletic or uxorious members. At the Golf Club — well, obviously : and at the Dome one talked about the war with special reference to Sir Victor's latest donation to the War Fund. It was all very simple and tidy, and one knew exactly what was expected of one. Apart from the British, the Americans had a town club on British lines, and a country club structurally similar but socially quite dissimilar to its British counterpart. The vital difference was that here women were allowed in the bar ; two people sober here made as much noise as twenty people drunk in the British club, and while in fact I suppose the Americans enjoyed themselves as much as we did, they considered that they enjoyed themselves a great deal more. The French Club had a beautiful ballroom, excellent food and drink ; the women, who were everywhere, were expected to be as chic as at the Country Club they were permitted to be dowdy, but that was about the only quality which was demanded of them. It was an admirable club. I never penetrated the doors of the German clubs, but I have absolutely no doubt that I should have found there good beer, good tennis, good fellowship and good pictures of a bad man. The Rowing Club, catering for youth and energy, qualities allergic to frontiers, was international.

So much for the foreigners and their tribal characteristics and customs : what of the Chinese ? There was no accurate estimate of population made in Shanghai in 1940, but we understood that the number was between three and four millions. Of these, 70,000 were Russian, perhaps 7000 British, a total of 5000 French and Americans, then all the other nationalities of Europe represented by groups of hundreds. Without nationality were 10,000 Jewish refugees, who had expanded to 15,000 before I left. The remainder were Chinese, and three and a half millions amount to a formidable unit on the earth's surface. Shanghai is not a big city in area, so its inhabitants are intensely concentrated. It is not a vertical concentration, as in New York ; the number of notably tall buildings can be counted on the fingers ; it is a three-

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dimensional concentration — everybody is simply very close to everybody else, so that one cannot move without disturbing one's neighbours. Driving in the streets, especially Nanking Road, is a harrowing experience, the more so as a Chinese, whether walking or driving or pulling one of the innumerable rickshas, is able so to detach his mind from its harassing surroundings that he will just keep moving in any direction without regard to any other traffic. Shanghai started as a port, and its prosperity is still anchored in the river, but the original nucleus has snowballed to a size which bears no direct relation to the foreign trade. Population attracts population ; any crowd of people is a potential market, to which the vendors flock, themselves adding to the crowd. Apart from normal civic development, politics and their corollary, war, have further swelled Shanghai's numbers. Shanghai, like Hongkong, has long been a haven where law and order have been, by the standards of Eastern Asia in general, rigorously maintained. When our Chinese manager was shot at Hsuehchow the soldiers went on playing football, but the foreigner's conception of the law urges him to investigate and interfere in all matters of violence, whether they concern him immediately or not. So political leaders and defeated war-lords, as well as gangsters and racketeers of all kinds, have always been in the habit of using the Foreign Settlements as a sanctuary against each other, as well as a meeting-ground where conflicting parties can negotiate their unholy mergers without either risking his neck by venturing upon the territory of the other. At the moment this situation was produced on a grand scale, for the International Settlement was neutral ground between two warring powers, sought by the weak or timid of both sides for the sake of its comparative security, and by the agents of both for the furtherance of their schemes.

The site of Shanghai was originally occupied by the British and Americans by *force majeure*. The Chinese did not encourage the foreigners to come further into China, but they showed a willingness to meet them at the coast, increasingly so as they discovered the potentialities of foreign trade, and to bring their goods down to the sea. Thus from the first the foreigners sat down behind their stockades, under the guns of their warships, and the Mountain came to Mahomet ; and although for many

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years foreigners, especially the British, had been extending their interests in the interior, a vast majority of them still operated on the coast, and of those of course the majority were in Shanghai. Consequently the "Shanghailanders" never lost the arrogant, almost buccaneering, attitude with which they began. Unlike the British in Hongkong, they had no responsibilities, and they neither patronised the Chinese nor pretended to be particularly interested in their welfare. They were there, as they never forgot, because they were strong and hard, and they expected to remain there as long as those two attributes continue to apply. I found, wandering up the Yangtse valley and beyond, that the discovery of China was a very humbling experience, but Shanghai has been spared this chastening. For decades the Chinese have dug the treasures from the far corners of their land and brought them down to the wharves of the Whangpoo, and even with their own hands loaded them on to the foreign ships. They have learned the foreign tongue and foreign methods of business. They have accepted in exchange for their produce foreign goods and foreign money. They have subjected themselves to foreign law on their own soil; they have permitted the foreigners to travel the length and breadth of China with immunity from the Chinese law. Finally — and this is the greatest surrender of all — they have aped the foreign dress and the foreign dance, and by adopting foreign industrial methods have built up greater individual riches and wider public destitution than ever existed before. No wonder the handful of foreigners took a pride in this triumph of European personality over Asiatic numbers.

I do not wish to depict the foreigners as fools and knaves, because they were neither. It is an unfortunate fact that industrialisation seldom has a good effect on a people, though in the long run it should improve the standard of living. Up to the last few decades it has been accepted throughout history that the soundest economic unit is the yeoman, and that he will be the healthiest member of any community. When through lack of management in agriculture men are forced to leave the land for the cities, degeneration is invariably observed. There were cities in China many hundreds of years before we can trace them in Europe, so the foreigners can obviously not

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American and Japanese, divided up the Settlement into separate spheres of interest. The Japanese took over complete control of the eastern end, the district of Hongkew, beyond the creek, while the Municipal Police continued to function normally in the remainder, side by side with the British, American and Italian (!) military or naval units. Admittedly the Japanese Army rode roughshod through the streets on both sides whenever they felt inclined, but on the whole a state of truce, if not of harmony, existed between the factions. There had been incidents. Late in 1939 a young English policeman shot about half a dozen Japanese police who disregarded his challenge. I heard a bloodthirsty first-hand account of this episode from another policeman: "We picked one up, he was dead: the next one was still alive, so I kicked him in the guts and four bullets fell out of him, and there was young K., with his tommy-gun still smoking, white as a sheet and laughing like hell. . . ." But everything was kept superficially smooth, as the foreigners wanted conflict avoided as long as possible, and the Japanese were not quite ready. The persecutions of Tientsin, and the face-slapping episodes which were regarded as so shameful by people in Britain who apparently expected the people in China to hit back, had been called off. The Japanese repeatedly invented new devices to hamper and curtail foreign trade, but in some ways they were surprisingly helpful — for example, in certain cases they gave us a rebate on taxes paid to them if we could show that the goods made in Shanghai were to be sold in Free China. The Jewish refugees were permitted to live in some sort of security, and certainly looked after themselves better than the Russians who came before them.

In one respect there was a real community of interest between all the influences in the Settlement and the French Concession; everyone was anxious to stay the horrid procession of murders which stalked ever more blatantly through the streets. There was ordinary banditry and robbery with violence and gang warfare. On two occasions there were gun battles in Nanking Road between police and criminals, in both of which innocent bystanders were killed; but political assassination was not so much a series of incidents as a continuous process. I believe there was an average of one assassination per day for the last six months of 1940. The

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Japanese were busily building up the new Nanking puppet government, which offered a career without a future for anybody who cared to take it on. The back streets were full of the emissaries of Chungking, amateur and professional assassins, and "traitors" were shot in the streets, in bed, in the cabarets, in their cars. If they decided to back out, the Japanese shot them *pour encourager les autres*. The patriotic murderers were shot in return whenever they could be found. Both sides were determined to prevent organisation in their opponents. The leader of the White Russian community, an elderly and courageous gentleman who had stood up to the Japanese on behalf of his people, was shot. The Mayor of Greater Shanghai, the one really good Chinese who had taken office under the Japanese, not for gain or from fear, but in the desire to help his suffering fellow citizens, was duly knifed in the summer of 1940. Terrorism was practised against the pro-Allied press. A courageous American radio commentator, apart from having his broadcasts consistently jammed, had a price on his head and did not move without a bodyguard. The newspapers kept armoured cars outside their offices; it was bad luck for one of them when the Russian guard accepted a bribe, jumped out of his car, and himself threw a bomb in through the office window and decamped. When I went home to Broadway Mansions one night the lift was apparently stuck at the top. The Japanese manager smilingly told me that Mr. Abend (correspondent of *The New York Times*) had visitors. He had. They beat him up and destroyed the unfinished manuscript of his book, and next day he went to live the other side of the creek. There were also murders in the way of business. When the British-owned taxis crossed over the Garden Bridge into Japanese territory, Korean passengers slipped wires over the drivers' heads and gently garrotted them, so that in a surprisingly short time the Japanese taxis had a monopoly east of the bridge. Farren's Night Club was the most successful of the gambling houses. One night in December the agent of a rival firm killed an Indian watchman at the door and an English girl on the dance floor, and Farren's wheel stopped revolving. Altogether Shanghai was not too comfortable a place to live in. When these outrages occurred in the Settlement, the Japanese always threatened to take over complete

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control on the ground that the international authorities could not maintain order. Everyone was ghoulishly delighted, therefore, when murder was done in the Japanese-controlled area, and we all laughed heartily when three Japanese officers were shot, in one week in the autumn, all in Hongkew.

1940 was a year of steady deterioration. The cost of living was rising rapidly, though the sterling value of the dollar hung with surprising tenacity at the 3½d. mark to which it had fallen in the preceding year. Those of the foreigners whose income was derived directly from China were hard hit, especially the Municipal Police, whose salaries were not increased anything like in proportion to their fall in purchasing power — and this at a time when the police were harder worked than ever before. This injustice — due to the fact that the Council's Chinese members would not countenance any increase in salaries of foreign employees only — had a regrettable effect in that many of the best policemen threw up their jobs and went home to work for their country, which in fact needed them less at home than in this outpost. The blitzkrieg began, and ran its unbelievable course to the Atlantic coast, stunning with the horror of it my Norwegian, Danish, Dutch and many French friends, not to mention ourselves. No more was washing hung on the Siegfried Line. Those who could get away joined up. Those who could afford it began to send their wives away, two big liners taking most of the well-to-do American ladies and children away to the States, while the British went in smaller batches to Canada and Australia. To the last, ill-feeling between the nationals of belligerent countries reached no very high pitch. To my regret, the German members of the Rowing Club were suspended on the ground that sooner or later there would be ugly incidents : it was my view at the time that what we still retained of civilisation could best be served by a display of restraint and good manners at this great distance from the centre of trouble ; probably I was wrong. More ridiculously I was taken to task by the committee of the Country Club for being seen in public with an Italian girl — a young woman of markedly anti-Fascist tendencies, as well as great charm. Nightly at a certain street intersection you might observe the American, British and Italian soldiers standing on guard side by side. I joined the Shanghai Light Horse, a distinguished

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component of the distinguished Volunteer Corps, but never bestrode a horse ; our job in these days was to patrol the streets in lorries or on foot on days which precedent or historical significance (such as the anniversary of the war or the Republic) marked as auspicious occasions for disorder. Most of us also joined a special corps formed to guard British shipping against sabotage. Apart from that there was little we could do except gather in as much foreign exchange for the Bank of England as we could by day, and relax dynamically at night.

As always, Shanghai was at its gayest in time of crisis. The decks were cleared by the departure of the less hardy of the women folk. Most of us wanted desperately to be away in Europe ; we felt that this city that had withstood so many storms in its short history was at last about to sink back into the primeval mud on which it was built ; we could make no direct contribution to its survival except by carrying on the Bluff to the bitter end, so we sought refuge from thought in living what my doctor severely described as " a fast life ". Cocktail parties, dinner parties, theatre parties, all developing into dances till dawn, and the Municipal Orchestra on Sundays. Drink was still marvellously cheap and fatally plentiful, but we did not on the whole resort to the deadly, desperate drinking of the lonely out-ports, not needing, in the presence of the opposite sex and manifold diversions, the escape through alcohol alone. I never failed to drive myself safely home. I found myself in demand at weddings, and, in all, officiated four times during the year as usher or best man. The beautiful Betty from Manila passed through Shanghai, going to and from Japan ; on the return journey I introduced her to a good friend in the Navy, which had a result which upset certain of my plans. After an acquaintance of two days they were separated by her return to Manila, but then began a correspondence of such volume and intensity that in a few weeks she was back, complete with Mamma, and a few days later they were married. My feelings as usher on this occasion were tinged with an artistic melancholy. I went to the church early, and found it heavily garnished with tuberoses. Observing the Dean's wife advancing towards me, I was about to remark politely on the floral situation when she anticipated me by saying briskly, " Hullo, you the Best Man ? My goodness, what a stink." As a further

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comment on the irreverence of the age, I put it on record that of four weddings I attended, at three the bride and groom exchanged winks during the homily. Other events occurred from time to time, humorous or at least piquant. One wealthy and important citizen had his new car stolen one night from a position suggestively near a house of most doubtful reputation, where he said he had gone to fetch a friend. Another younger man was awakened one Sunday morning by his boy tapping on the bedroom door to announce the visit of his mother and sister. The gentleman was unfortunately not alone ; when he greeted the ladies in the sitting-room, he found to his dismay that they had brought him a birthday present of curtains for his bedroom, and were anxious to try them out in the appropriate setting.

The municipal elections also gave us a certain simple pleasure. For many years the sixteen seats on the Council had been divided, British and Chinese, five each, Japanese and Americans, three, and apart from occasional ambitious independents, the nations had not poached on one another's ground. At the previous elections the Japanese had been more aggressive, and were kept in check with difficulty by the British, and this year it was reported that they were making a big drive for at least one more seat, so that, with the Chinese whom they could coerce, they would have a clear majority. The qualification for suffrage was possession of property to a certain rateable value in the Settlement, and all British ratepayers were urged to come without fail to the polls. The Japanese publicly announced their impending triumph ; it seemed likely that the elections would be a spirited affair, and I found myself enrolled as a strong-arm man at one of the polling stations in case of trouble. There was none, for both sides were too confident to be truculent, the Japanese because of their numbers and an ingenious system for voting twice (some scores of them, having voted at one booth, went to another, pleaded destroyed papers and voted again — or would have, but for a very efficient communications system between the different authorities which resulted in the rejection of the duplicated votes), the British for another reason. I never quite discovered what happened, but at the last moment the British-American majority on the Council put through certain reforms. Say, for example, that the property

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qualification for a vote was \$500 ; the big buildings, such as the Hongkong-Shanghai Bank, were worth \$500,000, but the Bank carried only fifty votes. The British so reshuffled and redistributed their possessions that they were able to get several hundred votes out of one property, each backed by the necessary value qualification, and the Japanese were swamped before the elections began. There was an oriental touch about the British handling of this affair which I thought showed great adaptability as well as courage in the authorities at such a moment. Once again we had a good laugh at the Japanese, and we made the most of each successive joke. It might be the last.

In July it was announced that British youths were required by the Indian Army, but the recruiting officers would only accept those who bore a certificate from their employers stating that their services could be spared. My Company refused, and flattered but exasperated I cast about for some activity that might relieve my feelings. I found myself entitled to five weeks' local leave, so on August 9, 1940, I set sail for Japan.

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THEY said I was a fool, that I should be overtaken by war in Japan, but I retorted that if war came they in Shanghai would be no better off than I — possibly worse — and bought my steamer ticket. The exchange position was peculiar, for as a result of the Japanese control, yen were worth 1s. 3d., or about four to one U.S. dollar, in Japan, yet could be bought for less than 4d. in the Shanghai market. Naturally the Japanese did not encourage the reimportation of their currency, and it was with some trepidation that I filled my pockets with one-yen notes before embarking. The journey from Shanghai to Nagasaki takes less than two days in quite reasonable steamers, and apart from the embarrassing requirements of the medical authorities in their search for cholera, requirements with which I was perversely unable for the time to comply, I remember nothing of interest.

On board I met a man called Percy, who looked the part, and after safely but tremulously surviving the ordeal of Customs and Exchange Control, we landed and got into a car. We travelled for an hour or two, first across subtropical country, reminiscent of parts of Indo-China, rich in foliage and not lacking in rice fields, then steadily uphill and into pine-woods. Our destination was Unzen, where Percy took me to an hotel which was expensive but clean, and after a wash I wandered out, as was my habit, to explore.

It was very good. The steepest hill in Shanghai was the six-foot rise of the Garden Bridge which I used to cross on my way to the office ; here was a real hill. Here was coolness and quiet after heat and noise, and the gentle scent of pine needles after the odour of the creek in summer and the thousand fighting smells of an Eastern city. Unzen is a spa, a cluster of little hotels among the trees, with no agriculture to support even a village. A few paces took me out of it, and I clambered up a rocky path. It was growing dark, and the wind soughed

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in the trees, sinister to my town-trained ear. The cicalas sobbed their endless lament, and as I walked, picking my way among the dark rocks, I presently heard a new noise, unearthly, frightening, a boiling and seething and bubbling underground. The earth trembled beneath my feet : a yellow miasma suffused the gloom, a stench of sulphur smote my nostrils and caused me to catch my breath. I stood still, and waited for the apparition, thinking of Faust that night on the Brocken bargaining with the Devil for the price of a soul. An instant was an hour, but no skinny claw tapped me on the shoulder. With an effort I raised my eyes to the horizon, a darker line across the night sky above me, and revolved where I stood, looking for a break in the skyline. There was none ; and I realised with a shock of relief that I was standing in the crater of a volcano that had not quite died.

I stumbled home to dinner and bed, and next morning set out with Percy and a pleasant Shanghai-German lady to play golf. Our fourth was a sterling Scotsman from Kobe called Bill, and we had an excellent day on the links. I was, and am, a shocking performer — Percy was plus two — but it did not matter, and I am sure I had more fun than he did. We bought old balls from the caddy-master (after losing them in the woods we bought them from him again next day), and between the rigours of the game and the charm of the scene — no longer crepuscular and menacing but a radiant green — our various preoccupations were stifled. It rained a good deal in the next few days, keeping us at home, but we took advantage of every fine interval to play golf or to drive down to the sea and bathe. The sea was still very warm, and we had a choice of surf or sheltered beach, and practically no other visitors to bother us. At Unzen I had for the first time the experience, not rare in the East, of seeing a crow swoop down from the trees and, in spite of the shrill cries of the caddies, pick up my ball from the green and carry it off to the tree-tops. I suspected the crows of being in league with the caddy-master, but I could never prove it. The evenings dragged ; I found the German ladies who formed the majority of the guests only moderately good company, while the mischievous attempts of Percy and Fanny to get me paired off with a strapping Russian wench so alarmed me that I hardly dared venture into the lounge. My one consolation was in the

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discovery that "Santory" whisky, made in Japan and kept for twelve years, was quite drinkable, and better than any other whisky produced outside the British Isles. For once I was glad of the imitative talent of the Japanese.

A chambermaid in Japan is always "Nei-San". They were pretty little things in a feeble way, slopping round in their slippers and not very elegant dress, and they thought I was extremely funny. So much so that whenever I spoke to them they clutched each other's hands and shook helplessly with irresistible mirth. For a time I took this response as a tribute to my surprising manhood, and tried, by encouraging smiles, to give the impression that I joined in the jest. After a time it became annoying; nothing was ever done quite as it should be, and no amount of feminine mirth is a substitute for hot water to shave with in the morning. At this time Air Raid Precautions were having a week's rehearsal in Western Japan. The hotel windows were vaguely blacked out; one tripped over buckets of water in unexpected places; in the road one was impeded by gendarmes and volunteers, roping off imaginary craters, toting empty hoses, throwing red-cotton balls about (incendiaries) and calling on the civil population to play up. In and out among the principals trotted the chorus of Nei-Sans, carrying buckets or stretchers or bags of sand, one and all, every moment, without pause for breath or speech, giggling uncontrollably. There seems to be some danger that if you push any section of a community (as the Japanese push their women) into an entirely subordinate and irresponsible position, you will be left with inane morons incapable even of the limited initiative necessary for the menial tasks you assign them.

After a week or so of pleasant but unprofitable existence at Unzen I set off for the East. I travelled for twelve hours in an excellent train. We started at night, but in the morning there were many delightful glimpses of the Inland Sea, and glimpses of some of the more formidable units of the Japanese Navy that gave me less pleasure. At Kobe I planned to stay a day or two with Bill, who worked for a big import-export firm there, and after installing me in his house he took me down to the Kobe Club to meet the "Boys".

My visit occurred shortly after the attack of spy fever which swept Japan in the summer of 1940, and caused the arrest of

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some score of British residents in Japan. Some of them were released after a few weeks, and I met a number of these gaol-birds, as their friends cheerfully called them, at Kobe. Others were still in prison, including two brothers in Shimonoseki who had been good citizens of that port all their lives, and had contributed much to its prosperity. One Englishman, a shipping agent, was imprisoned on two charges : (a) that he read and discussed foreign newspaper accounts reflecting discredit on the Japanese effort in China, and (b) that he had given information regarding soundings in the harbour to the shipping companies of which he was the representative. Reuter's correspondent, Cox, arrested in Tokyo, fell from a window and was killed : the true circumstances of his death will never be known, but there is no evidence that he was subjected to physical torture. Even those I met, who had not suffered for very long, showed signs of the ordeal it must always be to be in the clutches of a hostile, irresponsible, ruthless and not very intelligent power, but of actual hardship they had not much to say. One Japanese girl I met told me something else. She was of the Samurai class, extremely good-looking, and much more finely built than other Japanese women, her slender wrists and ankles, so different from the utilitarian drain-pipe limbs of the women of lower degree, indicating the racial element in the ancient class distinction. Her brother had been suspected — only suspected, mark you — of the crime of "liberal tendencies". One day, saying nothing to him, the police took away his wife, who was six months gone with child. They brought her back to her distracted husband three days later, her boy having been born, dead, of course, as a result of the "interviews", with the message that liberal tendencies were not considered useful to the State. It is worth bearing in mind that the child was their first-born, and the Japanese are not only passionately fond of their children personally but regard their succession as a matter of the highest religious significance.

Obviously the Kobe British community was not very happy. The Japanese had evidently treated the foreigners leniently by Japanese standards, thus demonstrated as regarding suspicion alone as justification for child-murder, but there was no knowing how long this restraint would last. Up till a very few years before, foreigners had really loved living in Japan : the

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friendliness, *naïveté*, gaiety and enthusiasm of this clever child-like people, with their good manners and attractive habits, had made the life of their Western guests a continuous delight. It was as if with adolescence a child had lost its natural affections, turned moody and bitter, and become suspicious of its friends and resentful of its parents. (This illustration is too facile, but there is indeed something childish about a people, Russian or Japanese, that can instantaneously redirect its heart on the advice of its government.) Not that people in the streets were hostile — they were not : in all my wanderings I saw no indication of hostility whatever — but they were also not friendly. They were indifferent. Various restrictions were placed on foreigners ; Japanese people were not encouraged to mix with them, especially with the English ; and these and other factors, small in themselves, combined with the lurking fear of imprisonment and loss of business to depress the spirits of my Kobe friends.

Bill took me to Osaka by the electric train in which thousands of business men "commute" every day. I was staggered by the size of the city. I went along the big main street, with its stone buildings, until I was tired, when I took the Metro. I went to a vast department store, on the scale of Harrods, and from the roof-garden had a dingy but impressive view of square mile after square mile of factories. Most of them were cotton mills, for Osaka's output of piece goods challenges that of Manchester in its prime. Bill took me to a luncheon club where business men, Japanese and foreign, sat down to a very meagre meal ; where I disgraced myself, and received a sharp kick on the shin from my host, through brightly remarking that in three years in blockaded China I had never been offered so inadequate a repast. There is no doubt that high-class food was already very scarce in Japan. Rice for the workers, aided by some plunder from China, was still in good supply, but meat, vegetables and even fish seemed hard to get, beer was limited to a bottle a week and cigarettes were all but unobtainable. The shops were short of articles made of rubber or iron and I understood that good cotton goods, still more woollens, were hard to get, but I could not tell if the little clerks and business men in the train were more shoddily dressed than usual. It was clear, however, that the pinch could not be due to

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expenditure in China alone. The Japanese were saving up.

Before I left, Bill took me up the rack railway to the heights of Rokko, a hill rising high and steep behind the city of Kobe, rather like the Peak at Hongkong. Here, amid scenery more suited to the gambols of the chamois than to the recreation of tired business men, is a golf course, where in spite of the war-time embargo which, on anti-luxury grounds, prohibits the game to men under thirty years of age, we played. It was a sporting course, and there were a lot of players that Sunday. The Japanese are not at their best on a golf course. Their zeal is as great as their skill is small. They played a horrid, crouching, dribbling game, and it was no rare thing to see one of a Japanese foursome holding the green against any attempt to come through, while the other three beat the area in search of all four balls. How they ever hit the ball far enough to lose it was beyond conjecture. There was a grand view of the coast from the south side of the hill in the evening. Below us the blur of docks and chimneys that was Kobe; in the harbour numerous steamers, including some famous German and Italian refugees; and down to the left were the million pin-prick lights from the wooden factories of Osaka. I wondered when, if ever, these two accessible, inflammable cities would become targets for bombs.

It was a further twelve hours to Tokyo, mostly an uninteresting trip, though Fuji would have been visible if it had not been in cloud. I went to the famous Imperial Hotel, and was greatly disappointed thereby. I had heard of it as a wonderful building which made the reputation of its American architect by reason of its original and earthquake-resisting design. It has a queer shape, with long, rambling stone corridors — I was always getting lost — sunless courtyards and dark rooms; it is only two stories high, and it certainly defied the famous earthquake, but so did the many tall ferro-concrete buildings of more orthodox design that line the Ginza. The hotel is, moreover, cursed with the worst band I ever heard. Apart from the inability of the strings to play a correct note for any length of time, they were possessed when I first heard them of an insane ambition to "swing" Handel's Largo. This was a pity, as one of the pleasant characteristics of the Japanese which survives is a real fondness of European music. The fifth

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symphony of Beethoven was their favourite at that time, and no doubt they have endured the "V" campaign with the same equanimity as that with which they have received other inconveniences suffered by their allies. The only other foreigners in the hotel were Germans, very thin, smartly dressed, business-like men with vast, shiny despatch-cases.

I received an early set-back in Tokyo. I went straightway to call on the correspondent of *The Times*, and asked him what personality or what party was really "running" Japan at the moment. He said he had been unsuccessfully trying to find out himself for years. This was a blow. I had not expected to hear one name in reply, though in almost every other country in the world one man would have been the answer to my question, but I did hope to hear "Mitsui" (heavy industry) or The Army or The Young Officers. If a leading journalist could not spot the nerve centre of this country in years of study there was clearly no hope for me, and from the moment of this failure I gave up the attempt to "understand" Japan, contenting myself with what estimate I could make from observed phenomena. I called, with introductions, on people at the British Embassy, travelling by American-built taxi to a select and well-built suburb. The appearance of Central Tokyo is predominantly Western; the Ginza is as fine a street as is to be seen in any of the capitals of the world, and the suburban houses and blocks of flats leave little to be desired. A big open green area in the middle of the city, containing buildings of historic importance, improves both the scene and the atmosphere. The people at the Embassy were very kind, and told me what they could over the best food I had encountered in Japan. The ladies were rolling bandages in their spare time for British hospitals. When I asked if they would not be helping their cause more if they hired labour or machines to do the job for them, more efficiently and on a much greater scale, my hostess told me something rather important. She told me that she felt the gesture was valuable — that it really made a deep impression on the Japanese when English ladies of high class put their own hands to work for the wounded soldiers of their country. Even some of their Japanese lady friends had offered to help — a glimpse of private goodwill and niceness no longer on public view in Japan.

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The secret police intercepted a message passed between ladies of the British Embassy staff. The message was clearly in code, and the ladies' explanation that it was a knitting pattern was a palpable lie. However, after the Government decoding experts had grappled with the document for some weeks in vain, on the suggestion of a bright junior it was sent, just in case, to a knitting factory with the request that it should be acted upon. The reply came by return : " We regret that we cannot make this jumper as suitable wool is no longer available to the public ".

It was my misfortune that my visit coincided with Tokyo's A.R.P. week. There was a trial blackout every night, of great thoroughness, and practically no traffic passed through the streets, so that I missed seeing the theatres I had aspired to see. Instead I left the city, took the train back the way I had come to a station near Yokohama, and went up in a bus to the hill resort of Myanoshita. It was a long climb. Japan is most fortunate in that when it becomes too hot in her cities, it is always possible for the citizens to go up the hill which towers 2000 feet or so at their back door and there find cool air and fresh breezes and the restful society of woods and mountains. There was a fine hotel and, whether for purposes of propaganda or through the enterprise of its manager, rationing had largely passed it by. It was full of tourists, all, except for a handful of Americans, people of pro-Axis sympathies. A few miles up the hill was a tolerable golf course, round which I daily battered in company with my two small girl caddies, dressed hideously in blue serge, crinkly black stockings and big straw hats. Each carried an umbrella. I could never get a smile or any other human reaction out of these little creatures ; even when I hit three balls into deep water, one after another, not a flicker of interest showed in their faces. Their young minds must have been as dull and subdued as their clothes ; I would have preferred the giggles of the Nei-Sans, who at least wore coloured dresses, to this unnatural austerity in mock-Western schoolgirl garb. I went for long walks too, over the mountains, and saw glimpses of Fujiyama, towering purple in the distance. Back at the hotel in the evening I looked for companionship, without finding very much solace. I was asked to play bridge one evening, and it was only after I had consented that they told

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me the object of the game was to cheer up a lady of some seventy-five years who had lost her husband the week before. We had a riot of fun. I recognised a girl I had seen on the steamer between Manila and Hongkong — she was due to marry an American friend of mine from Wuchow at the U.S. Consulate very shortly. (I afterwards heard she was evacuated to America the day after the wedding.) Her mother, an attractive and educated Irish woman, had married, as a second husband, an Italian, and espoused the Axis with the man. To hear this woman, with the accent of the English upper class, foretelling the early defeat of Britain and enthusiastically welcoming that happy event, was one of the most disgusting experiences I have known so far in this war. Painful at any time, it was made particularly so for me in those days of September 1940, when Japanese papers carried in big type the German story of the Battle of Britain. One night it was reported that the Germans had landed in Ireland. Seeing me depressed, the old widow's portly nurse took me aside and regaled me first with various clinical anecdotes such as women of her profession delight in, and finally with the story of her own pretty sister who had been mutilated by a negro who thrust half a bottle into her face in a speakeasy. This macabre diversion was kindly meant, and at least kept me from using physical violence on that daughter of the Devil and Eire. There are few people for whom, after the passage of years, I so heartily wish the worst.

After a week of this existence I still knew nothing about the Japanese. Hotel staffs are always more or less denationalised, and I did not meet any others. The few farmers or peasants I encountered were just like their class everywhere in the world, industrious, cheerful on a fine morning, courteous to strangers, but not very interested. I went back to Tokyo, and at the Embassy met an elderly lady publicist who was giving lectures in the Orient on (I think) British Women at War. I did not like her very much, but as I do not anyway like lady publicists, that does not prove very much. Nor could she tell me very much about Japan. I decided — after all, I was on holiday — to accept my ignorance and not to worry any more, but as I sped westwards in the train I searched my mind to see what I had really learned from my visit. That

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most unstable of vessels. The mere odour of luncheon — fish soup and fried rice — was enough to put me off food for the rest of the day. The train took me across Korea by night, and I did not see much of it. At breakfast on Wednesday they offered me omelette. I said fried eggs. They said no fried eggs, only omelette. I said why? They said, sorry sir, eggs not fresh enough for frying. At lunch-time — very hungry indeed — I sat early in the dining-car, but the steak was uneatable and I was rationed to one piece of bread. We were in Manchukuo by now, and already I felt I was coming home. The country, dusty and parched as it was, seemed familiar; the train attendants were more friendly and obliging; the farmers in the country and on the stations were bigger, healthier, more human than the city-bred Japanese to whom I had unconsciously become accustomed. Arrived at Moukden, I sought the Company mess, had a welcome bath, and arriving at the Club at six o'clock, saw a familiar face, and said, "For heaven's sake, get me something to eat". My friend Geoff said, "Certainly. Boy! Bring master a vodka-bitters."

After this vile dose had been repeated a few times, I lost my passionate interest in food. Presently Geoff took me along to a cocktail party, where the good work was continued with rather better materials, and later we went on to the birthday party of one of our American staff. Everybody was overwhelmingly hospitable. I was told next day that we had finally sat down to dine on the stroke of midnight, but by that time I was away in a world of my own, floating on the pink fumes of spirit brought to me from the collective farms of Siberia, the American rye plantations, the barley fields of Scotland and the potato and juniper groves for which London and Plymouth are presumably famous, and my recollections next morning were glamorous but few.

Practically the entire European population of Moukden was composed of members of our Company. The Russian merchants and tradesmen who had once made Moukden a thriving city, just as they had made Harbin the gayest city in the world, had for nine black years been so harried and persecuted, tortured, robbed, raped and murdered that the species had practically ceased to exist. The British and American banks, insurance companies and oil interests had been ejected from

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Manchukuo soon after it ceased to be Manchuria, and only our Company remained. We owed our survival to two things. One was our obvious value as tax-gatherers ; we were making far more cigarettes than anybody else, and every case we sold meant so many good dollars paid promptly to the Japanese authorities. The other, which is much more pleasant to think about, was the silence of the Director. Our Managing Director in Manchukuo at the time was a very big Englishman, and the story is that whenever Japanese officials came to his office with proposals, ordinances or threats, he greeted them with such a baleful glare from under his formidable eyebrows, and such a portentous and menacing silence, that every one of them, sooner or later, became demoralised and withdrew. The Company thus retained its face, its goodwill and — on sufferance — its property, but not much else. Cigarette production was subjected to a quota — considerably less than the potential consumption — and our people made the cigarettes, distributed them as fairly as possible among the dealers, and waited for next month. Currency was of course "frozen", and the profits could not be taken out of the Japanese Empire. We had therefore to spend as much money as we could get goods for — paper, etc. — in Japan, and put the rest into real estate in Manchukuo or into the banks. The salaries of the foreign staff reproduced the same problem in miniature. Each man was allowed to convert a limited number of the yen he received to foreign currency at the official rate, usually in order to contribute to the upkeep of his dependants, real or imaginary, in Europe. The remainder he had to spend, and as none of the normal outlets of the spending male — cars, theatres, good clothes, whisky, women — was available in extravagant quantities, he was in danger of accumulating a paper bank balance that was never likely to do him any good. So he bought as much vodka as he could hold and tried to gamble away the rest : but even so, somebody had to win.

If the foreigners in Kobe were harassed, the foreigners in Moukden were bitter. I have never seen, short of actual war, any community exhibit such bitter hatred of the people they live among. The Japanese were never mentioned in the Club without derogatory epithets. There was no attempt at compromise, not the slightest approach to friendliness between the

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racés. This surprised me, for in Shanghai, though we did not much like the Japanese, we did not let them worry us to that extent, and the officials and diplomats got along well enough. The fact is that the Moukden foreigners had seen the Japanese over a number of years during which they were by no means on their best behaviour ; moreover, the Japanese was in a position to give orders in Manchukuo : few people can take a sudden access of power without abusing it, and the British do not take easily to being subordinate, and long periods of restraint before real and imagined insults had got on their nerves. Whatever the cause, a sustained hatred is an exhausting possession, and I did not envy my colleagues in Manchukuo.

I left Moukden, after a brief tour of its depressing, dilapidated streets, the day after I arrived, and entrained for Peking, where I was to stay a while with my old friend Dudley, of Chengchow. I looked forward keenly to this part of my holiday, for everyone told me that nobody could be considered as knowing China who had not seen Peking. I reached it in twenty-four hours, the only untoward incident being provided by a Japanese passenger at breakfast. Faced with a knife and fork and two fried eggs (fresh ones, this time), he pushed aside the utensils, bent forward, placed his nose in one egg and his lips to the other, and inhaled. Dudley was at the station, and took me off to his charming house and wife, and introduced me to his embarrassingly new baby.

There is certainly something good and rare in the human atmosphere of the old capital. Here alone, instead of building themselves pompous houses in large compounds, the foreigners live in elegant Chinese houses, situated off back streets and little lanes called *hutungs*, with little courtyards and fish-ponds, with the dragon motif contorting the roof, and, if they are lucky, with lovely Chinese furniture and ornaments inside. Here alone Chinese and foreigners meet almost as equals, with the equality which should bind people of culture all over the world. The Chinese here have acquired from the foreigners not habits, but ideas, which they value according to their worth, while the foreigners have acquired the manners and polish and something of the austere cultural values of the best Chinese. Peking remains the cultural centre of China, being the home not only of many Emperors, of the best universities, the best scholars

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and the best hospital, but also of the dead and living exponents of Chinese art, whether in music, the stage, or painting, or work in silver, ivory and jade. And Peking, alone in China, is dominated by history expressed in terms of architecture.

I shall not attempt anything like an adequate description of the architecture of Peking. It begins with the ordinary little houses, continues with the elegant residences of present and past officials, and culminates gloriously with the palaces. I found an Australian friend, an artist, who having saved about £200 had settled down to live — he anticipated he could live for two years on that sum — in a minor but exquisite palace in a *hutung*. Together we drove out to the Summer Palace and bathed in the lake in front of it. Full as it was of relics and art treasures of the greatest significance, this palace impressed me least of the great buildings of the city. It is built on a hillside — the setting, indeed, is ravishing — which dictates the layout, and though the successive pavilions are, each one, perfect specimens in their way, they do not hang together with the inevitability of a great artist's unrestricted design. Quite the reverse is the Temple of Heaven, on the other side of the city. Here, with unlimited space at his disposal, the architect has concentrated on perspective, and you can stand hundreds of yards from the centre and every stone and step and balustrade catches the wandering eye and directs it straight to the great central tower, which stands there, kingfisher blue, challenging the heavens to compete in purity, colour and harmony.

The Temple of Heaven is a great personal triumph for its architect, but is neither an integral part of Peking nor an expression of the Chinese people as a whole. Inside the city of Peking, its nucleus and once the nucleus of all China, stands the Forbidden City. It is surrounded by a high wall, and is indeed a complete city unto itself, rectangular in shape, perhaps a square mile in area. Here the Emperors used to live: here are dwellings and offices, banqueting and assembly halls, palaces and kitchens and temples. Some of the buildings are huge, but the proportions are so exquisite and the harmony of the components so complete that mere bulk is of no significance except in so far as a loud or a soft note sounds right at a given point of a musical composition. For the Chinese, the Forbidden City is what Parliament and the Tower and the residence of the

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King, all built together by a master architect, might be for Englishmen. One could wander among the pavilions for days without seeing anything ugly or unseemly. Inside stand the remains of the greatest art collections the world has known, representing the patient toil of a thousand artists' loving hands (many of the best pieces have been plundered, others are in safer custody). One can so easily imagine the Emperor of China, greatest prince in all history, holding court in the Forbidden City, while thousands of miles away, under the watchful eye of Viceroy and Governor, cart and junk and screeching wheelbarrow set out on a year's journey to bring to the All-Highest his tithe of the treasure of the teeming provinces. Other cities have been the capital in their time, but Peking has outstayed them all by virtue of the majestic attributes with which successive monarchs have endowed it, and the peculiar brilliance of its people. Bad things have happened in the Forbidden City, bloodshed, cruelty, treachery and death have stained its halls ; but these things are never far from the seats of the mighty, and fall into place as components of tradition by which alone a nation can withstand time.

It seemed so wrong to come out and see a staff car full of Japanese officers nosing through the dusty street, reminder of China's shame, brought to pass in part at least by the facts symbolised by the monument behind me. For the Chinese achieved, while the rest of the world was grovelling through its adolescence, a state of perfection in their own sphere. The achievement of perfection is the negation of ambition, breeding arrogance, complacency, the beginning of decadence. No doubt the mechanical contrivances of the West seemed vulgar and superfluous to the beautiful minds of the super-civilised Chinese ; no doubt the Chinese were right in deploring the inelegant and barbarous pugnacity of the whites — as eloquently expressed in the Emperor Chien Lung's written word to King George III ; but this world is no place for perfection, and the unwillingness to learn from outside, which was inbred in the latest Emperors, was a major contributor to China's weakness today. There had been no fighting at Peking in this war, so there were no signs of violence. Finding no opposition, the Japanese military had behaved themselves comparatively well. The invaders were satisfied with the slow,

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insidious assault of drugs, which they made available in quantity, and the unobtrusive rooting-out of opposition. A week before I arrived seven young students of a Peking university, boys and girls seventeen years old, were arrested by the secret police for "anti-Japanese activities". They were buried alive.

To the south and west of the Forbidden City is the Legation Quarter. Here are the pompous and comfortable buildings which housed the Embassies of the Great Powers before they moved to Nanking in 1936, following the Government to which they were accredited. Here are lovely green lawns and French windows and big trees — it was a gracious existence while it lasted. The quarter is surrounded by a high wall and a moat, for here the Embassy staffs and their guards fought for their lives when they were besieged in the Boxer Rebellion. To the north and south are the mighty gates, Hata-Men and Chien-Men, the monarchs of all China gates, great lumps as it were of wall with a tunnel through the bottom and a roof on the top. South of the Chien-Men is the city's main marketing area, where on market days there is terrific congestion and confusion, as the farmers or tradesmen or housewives mill around the stalls, and shaggy Mongol ponies fidget and paw the ground, and sometimes a string of camels wanders by with their gait which looks so uncouth in a crowded street, so unutterably graceful on a desert skyline. Camels are rare in China as a rule, but Peking is a frontier town. Although the very essence of China is here, this is the point where civilisation stretches the shortest depth inland from the sea. Not here the 1700 miles of river from Shanghai to Chungking : on the east, the neighbouring mercantile city of Tientsin keeps watch on the ocean. To the north-east is Manchuria, now all Japanese, long the bitter foe of China. To the north the Great Wall, greatest monument in the world, stretches for many hundreds of miles along the frontier, winding up and down the hills, square and solid and forbidding to the hostile tribes beyond ; and away to the west, not so very far, is the beginning of the bad barren country of Central Asia, where few white men have been, and few will ever go, because there is nothing there but beaten man and savage Nature. So all kinds of people came to the market of Peking. A little further south were the streets allotted to

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the various trades — the Silversmiths' Street, Copper Street, Ivory Street, Jade Street and so on — in the fashion found in all commercial centres where industry is not highly developed ; there is a Corn Street and Wine Street still in the English city where I was born. I wanted to buy one good Chinese article in Peking, so I went along Jade Street one morning and persuaded the various merchants to bring their best objects to their shops next day. This was a dead period in this trade : on the one hand opulent buyers were scarce, and on the other, with currency so unstable, real property was regarded as the only good investment. Thus the dealers were not anxious to sell the work of Chinese artists, for such work has a permanent value which transcends such artificial values as diamonds or gold. The days were gone when one could buy the lovely porcelains of the Ming dynasty, and old ivory was no more to be found, but I saw some beautiful jade. I had conceived a passion for white jade, a medium in which much of the best contemporary work is being done. Having obtained his piece of stone, his expert eye judging the possibility of unseen flaws, the unknown artist sets to work in a remote village of Hopei. Two years later, if he has not made the smallest mistake in all those days of microscopic toil, the finished work stands before him, lustrous as pearl, clean and brilliant as diamonds. The best things I saw were worth thousands of pounds ; one moderate article I thought would do, and the bargaining had gone on for two hours before it dawned on me that, owing to a confusion in my mind regarding the monosyllables "chien", meaning a thousand, and "wan", meaning ten thousand, I was offering £250 instead of my total available wealth of £25. I never got my piece of jade ; having dazzled my eyes with the best I could not look at the lesser pieces ; but no doubt they will be there, and others beside them, when I get back after the war, or fifty other wars if it comes to that.

My leave was drawing to a close, so I left Peking sadly, not having given myself more than a glance at its glory. I had not seen it at a good time. The palaces were empty of princes. Humble consuls pattered round the ambassadorial lawns. Squat Japanese stood arrogantly, perhaps a little uneasily, at street corners. Government was a travesty. But I was there long enough to appreciate the potency of the traditions centred in

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Peking, and the spirit which built it and which impelled the Chinese to carry on long after their capital had passed from them. I could see, too, how impossible it must have been for a republican government to flourish there under the ghostly shadow of so much majesty departed ; but I hope Chiang will feel strong enough to go back there one day.

I travelled south down the Tientsin-Pukow railway, seeing again much the same fertile landscape, the same interminable plains that I had looked out on when I travelled from Chengchow, on the Peking-Hankow line. The northern half of that line, as I heard, was in Japanese hands, but subject to repeated guerrilla raids. These raids were somewhere between warfare and banditry. In a recent raid, in which a large quantity of dynamite was seized by the guerrillas, the Chinese station-master and numerous innocent bystanders were killed. In the uncompromising view of the guerrilla chiefs, using Jap-controlled railways is a form of treachery, and the Government which would burn whole cities would not worry about the deaths of a few nonentities in a good cause. But I was turning off to the East, through the area of China over which the Japanese had the best control, and no exciting incident occurred. I spent the night at Tsinanfu, one of our Company's depots where the Japanese had recently placed an interdict on our sales under the guise of a " spontaneous anti-British boycott ", but did not see much of the city. Next day I travelled all the morning and part of the afternoon across the hillier country of Shantung, where the climate has much in common with Europe. Sheep flourish here in the mountains, and apples grow, the lowlands produce corn in abundance, and almost any vegetable or fruit will live there, including even grapes. It was a pleasant scene to look out on in the summer sunshine, with the cool promise of autumn in the air, green fields, tawny hills with red rocky outcrop, and blue sky. Finally, as the afternoon advanced, I caught my first glimpse of the azure sea, with the pleasure inseparable to me from that experience, however often it is repeated, and left the station for my lodging at Tsingtao.

In Tsingtao the Japanese had something they really wanted, and they had not been forced to spoil it. It is a considerable port, opening as it does into the rich province of Shantung, and in peace-time its docks are kept busy with coastal steamers,

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carrying Shantung products to the bigger ports of Shanghai and Hongkong for reshipment all over the world. Its real fame of late years had been as a seaside resort ; with the hills behind, and along the disciplined beaches the rows of neat villas (Axis flags now sadly outnumbering the Allied), it was a restful and homely sight. The night I arrived the Japanese were entertaining their new German and Italian friends, and one heard strains of music coming from a number of parties ; I felt almost sorry for the European performers at this farce, for no educated person who has lived in China for years could feel a real affection for Japan today. Moreover, the new *camaraderie* between Italy and Germany, never very pronounced in the East, was hardly likely to achieve perfection in Tsingtao, a German colony before the war, returned to China by the Allies in 1919, now firmly held by the Japanese.

I spent a couple of days of real relaxation on the beaches, in company with old friends and a few new ones, before embarking for Shanghai. The Japanese steamer was a good-looking craft, and I did not know till later that she was notoriously unseaworthy and had twice sunk and been refloated. Among the passengers were several English families on transfer from Dairen, and some delightful Danes and French. Down on the lower deck, entirely exposed to sun or spray, was a complete Russian cabaret party, composed of a male band and the female "dance hostesses", returning from the season in Tsingtao, whither the ladies of Russia were wont to flock in search of the American or British navies every summer. It was a shock to see among them Lera, a dear girl with whom I had danced away many dollars during my periodic visits to Hankow in 1936. Four years of cabaret life had not dealt too kindly with Lera, but she still exhibited the amazing cheerfulness with which so many of the White Russians face their unlovely lives, and seemed to be the older sister to whom the others of the troupe turned with their troubles.

It was rough the first night, and the ship wallowed drunkenly with a perpetual list to starboard, so that I had difficulty in keeping in my bunk. I was glad to leave it at dawn next day, and went up to the top deck, where a sad sight greeted my eyes. The mothers in the first class had succumbed to *mal de mer*, and the fathers, whose recourse to old-fashioned remedies the night

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before had not fitted them for early rising, were holding the baby. The children seemed to be in their usual rude health with that irritating immunity from adult afflictions which they so often show, and it was pathetic indeed to see the men, haggard, bloodshot and unshaven, struggling with the problems of management which their wives had always solved so easily. Only the French lady, beautifully dressed, sat calmly with two shining and docile children, enjoying the view and the bracing air without a hair out of place. I felt less concerned on behalf of others when I observed the sun rising on the starboard horizon, and learned that we had turned back to avoid a typhoon.

By that night we were back at Tsingtao, and during the ensuing twenty-four hours of waiting for the weather to subside nobody was allowed ashore, for some reason connected with quarantine. We made a fresh start on the third day, and the journey was very pleasant. The deck passengers, prepared for a day and a half at sea instead of four, had had a bad time — I managed to smuggle fruit and chocolate and even bread to Lera from the first-class table, feeling revoltingly patronising as I did so — and apart from occasional misgivings regarding my reception at the office when I arrived back three days late, I thoroughly enjoyed myself. Shanghai looked dirty and fussed, but it was good to be home among my own belongings again.

History had been moving on while I was playing. The Battle of Britain had passed its first phase, and been won — we could not, at that range, realise how completely and how gloriously. The second stage, the bombing of British cities by night, had begun. More of my friends were getting away, but there was still no chance for myself. I saw with sadness our Yangtse gunboats being dismantled in the Whangpoo as we slid upstream. Their crews were needed elsewhere. After the Navy, the troops. One day in October (I think it was) a scene of sad pageantry was enacted at the Race Club. The two battalions of British troops, one of Seaforth Highlanders, the other of the East Surrey Regiment, had been called to duties elsewhere in the Empire. Before they left, the appropriate ceremonial was observed. Almost every European in Shanghai was at the Race Club that autumn afternoon, to see the two bands, the

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drums and fifes of the "Surreys" and the pipers of the Sea-forths, as they marched alternately to and fro playing the "Retreat". There was a profound silence among the crowd : for the British the occasion had a poignancy which I need not define, as well as for the other peoples who had so long looked to us for sympathy and a measure of security : and I saw Germans and Italians amongst the spectators scarcely less moved, for whatever our governments might be doing, we had all been friends and comrades for so long, and this was a retreat of white men, rather than of any particular nation, from the East. For the first time in its short vivid history Shanghai was to be without an English soldier. Few of us expected ever to see their ruddy countenances, majestic kilts and flawless khaki on Chinese soil again.

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THE immediate consequence of the withdrawal of the British troops from Shanghai was a sharp increase in the duties of the Volunteers, who on top of their ordinary duties had now to undertake the guarding of part of the Perimeter. This entailed permanent occupation of a series of blockhouses commanding the various gates through the wire surrounding the Settlement. The affair was well organised, and individuals usually spent only twenty-four hours a fortnight in a block-house ; but we were already guarding ships against sabotage for twelve hours once a week, and those who had a lot of work to do in their offices found it hard going. (I was not one of these.) Another consequence was a feeling of isolation ; everybody felt the Retreat was the beginning of defeat, and every foreigner who left the country increased by a fraction the solitude of the remainder.

The sense of isolation, coupled with the dreadful news from Europe, had a curious effect on the consciences, both private and public, of the British in Shanghai. Their war activities were obviously limited by their geographical position, but they longed continually to share in the burdens of the people at home. The War Fund was one outlet for these aspirations. Every day the morning paper published a list of donations received in the last twenty-four hours, sometimes the name of the donor being given, sometimes a pseudonym. Like my Tokyo lady friend's bandages, it was a gesture — even children would give half their birthday presents, and some of those who could least afford it gave handsome sums — but the real backbone of the fund came from great slabs of money from the big companies, most of which would anyway sooner or later have found its way to the British war chest by way of income tax. A daily News Bulletin was published, under the aegis of the Embassy's Press Office, and distributed free, and there was a British Broadcasting Station from which broadcasts were made

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in many languages : volunteer assistance was extensive in both activities. British residents held a meeting, or rather a debate, in which the motion was " The British war effort in Shanghai is insufficient ", and the motion was carried in spite of the lack of any concrete suggestion for improvement. Some people seemed to think that they could do some good by dashing home to London or Coventry and submitting their persons to bombing. One could also spot the type of man, " Wish I was ten years younger ", who cannot endure to see young men out of uniform, however valuable a job they may be doing as civilians. I thought, as I still think, that the true function of the British in Shanghai at that time was simply to continue to exist and support to the best of their dwindling power what was left of British prestige. But most people were pathetically anxious to be told to do *something*. Having little money and few illusions I took up physical fitness, not so much as a contribution as an escape, and started rowing. We rowed in eights, usually at dawn, and what with the 5000-ton steamers that were apt to loom up out of the fog, the Japanese speed-boats that tore past leaving a mighty wash behind them, and all the usual hazards of rowing on a big tidal river, it was a satisfactory diversion, and circumscribed my nocturnal activities to some extent. We continued to dance and dissipate when we could, and in general festivities were more rather than less attended as crisis loomed. The assassinations were in full blast. Whenever one of their soldiers was killed, the Japanese, who were becoming increasingly nervous and difficult, would close all the bridges across the creek, causing me a good deal of inconvenience, and I began to think reluctantly of moving. I was still forbidden to join up, but at the end of October I had the recruiting officer to lunch and extracted from him a promise that if I either secured the permission of my employers or, by leaving my job altogether, became a free agent, he would accept me for the R.A.F. Faced with *un fait accompli*, the Company was magnanimous, and my name went down on the list for the next ship.

The remaining weeks were highly coloured. I did not in my heart think we could possibly win the war at that time ; I think most of the younger people in China felt the same, though the older generation, whom one might have expected to be the more realistic, fell back on a stolid faith and opined that we

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should muddle through because we always had. Consequently I redoubled my efforts in all directions ; my jealous friends who were remaining joined in my celebrations with something of the gusto of maidens preparing a friend's trousseau, and imminent parting did its fell work in stimulating the emotions.

I had a last glance at the Japanese. I went to the North station to meet a friend. As I went in I saw an elderly Chinese of middle class in the hands of two Jap military police. He had been apprehended presumably for some minor crime, walking the wrong side of the barrier or carrying with him a small quantity of rice — absolutely forbidden by the invaders, who required every ounce for their armies. As the old man was led away towards the police-box, he was being attacked from behind by a big, savage police dog, of which he was palpably terrified. When I passed by on my way back, the guards had stripped the old man naked and shut him up in a hut with the dog, which they were encouraging with gleeful shouts through the window.

At last word came that my steamer, *Sarpedon*, was ready to sail. Certain farewells were too moving to dwell on here. To turn one's back on the friends of a substantial chapter of one's life is anyhow one of the saddest things. We spun downstream on the lighter towards the anchorage. As we passed the Italian gunboat I am afraid we eased our feelings by shouting rude words, in which the place which had been the scene of a recent Greek victory must have been audible to at least one seaman who gratified us by shaking his first in true Latin-theatrical manner. After all, the ship did not sail that night, but I could not face the anti-climax of a return to the shore, and drank myself sorrowfully to sleep. Even next day we did not get far. Somebody had misjudged the tide, and we sat all the afternoon hard aground on a sandbank off Woosung, near the Yangtse's mouth, so it was only on the third day on board that we saw the uninspiring skyline of enormous China sink down into the muddy waters and gently disappear.

As a result of our late start we spent only a couple of hours on Sunday morning in Hongkong, time for me to greet and say farewell to one particular friend in an encounter so short that it gave us both more pain than pleasure. Thirteen volunteers for the R.A.F. landed on Friday morning at Singapore. On

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that day and the next we were medically examined at Seletar ; six passed, seven failed, including myself. They said that my heart was unsatisfactory, and kicked me most unceremoniously out. If I had then, as a civilian, had the respect I now have for military authority I suppose I should have stayed out and drifted into a staff job in Malaya or India, but I was not yet used to submission, and after two days of making a nuisance of myself to a lot of people, in which process I travelled seventy miles by taxi, I failed indeed to get the medical board's decision changed, but extracted myself from the clutches of the Malayan Army, rebooked my cancelled passage and even borrowed money to pay for it. So when *Sarpedon* with a mighty cargo of rubber resumed her voyage on Monday afternoon, I was still there, tired but relatively triumphant, among the passengers.

Of the rest of that journey there is little to be said ; my memory has recorded a series of impressions, among which heat and weariness conflict with personal relationships for prominence. Up to Penang, where we saw some of the Sea-forths ; down to Colombo, where I sculled on a lake so full of fish that I expected to be consumed forthwith if I fell in ; a dreary zigzag course down to the Equator again, across the wide Indian Ocean and down the African coast with a light following breeze that melted human flesh like tallow before a flame. New Year's Eve saw us coming into Durban, facing for the first time the continent of Africa, wondering whether it was entirely surrounded by shiny white seaside hotels. On to Cape Town, very much the English provincial town, with Table Mountain lost in fog and the lovely suburbs beyond our ken. Here it was cool enough for tweeds. A crowd of jolly, burned-up, thirsty people came on board — the coasters, we called them — returning from holidays to their jobs in Freetown or Lagos. With their co-operation we celebrated the crossing of the Line with traditional pageantry, but soon after I became ill, with a wretched pustule on my face and a raging temperature which quite baffled the ship's doctor and even an expert sent off from the hospital at Freetown. Only two military medical officers, a lieutenant and a colonel, sustained the reputation of the profession by saying " 104° ? Nothing to worry about ! Lots of rest and fresh air and leave the rest to the patient ! " From a porthole I saw at Freetown my first

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angry guns of the European War. An aircraft flew over from Dakar and every gun on every ship in the big concentration opened up. As a result of recent casualties among native civilians from shrapnel the gunners were forbidden to fire over the city, and as the pilot continued to orbit in that area and the gunners continued to fire everywhere else, it was a very ineffective battle. It was now well into January, and we began to think of arriving ; but a lonely vessel must take a long and weary course in those waters and those days. Right out into mid-Atlantic we went, twisting and turning every inch of the way like a hunted hare. It was a grand homecoming all the same. The albatrosses ceased to follow us, the flying fish no more caught the eye of the volunteer watch, skimming over the paravanes. Climate gave place to weather, and the infinite variety of shape and colour of broken clouds and the sea beneath them took over from the uninterrupted blues to which we had been so long accustomed. In the first days of February it began to be really cold, and the nocturnal submarine watch (I was beginning to recover) was unpleasant even for the passengers, who did a very short shift ; how much more so for the regular crew. Finally when it seemed that we must soon strike Iceland, and the Aurora Borealis was on view nightly, we turned and began to tack southwards, and on February 11, which was my birthday, we were among the islands of the North-Western Approaches. In the distance we saw a great convoy ; an aircraft came out of a cloud, winked at us and sped away ; a passing destroyer signalled " Welcome Home " ; and that night we were at anchor off Gourock. It was seventy-seven days since we had left Shanghai, and I hope that Captain Nelson, who had the responsibility of so many lives and a priceless cargo, who knew all the dangers we passed without ourselves imagining them in those eleven weeks of unprotected wandering, and who remained steadfast and courteous throughout, will one day know how often at least one of his passengers has thought of him since.

Next day we steamed up the Clyde. For hours we glided upstream in a steady downpour of rain, and every yard of the banks was taken up with shipbuilding yards, each seething with activity. Stem to stern the new ships stood, some mere skeletons among the bean-stalk scaffolding, some all but ready

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to slide down the slips into the stream, and all through the morning the clang of hammer and rivet was music to our minds. Docked at last, and on British soil — dirty and wet and forbidding, but ours. It was almost a pleasure to pay duty on presents of silk, so courteous were the British officials. A young soldier examining passports said, "Oho, you are the one who was in China! I know your brother." A naval officer on the quay said, "Surely I have seen you before?" I stepped outside a pint of draught beer, and another, and felt at home indeed.

It was all so reassuring. The people of untouched Glasgow laughed at us, self-consciously carrying our new gas-masks in cardboard boxes, and asked if we were "them refugees from London". We had heard of people taking two whole days to get to Town, but the train slid into King's Cross only one hour after the regulation eight. The station smelled the same, the taxi — when I got one — sounded the same, most of London was still there, and as I stole out of Paddington, across the meadows of Berkshire, through the vale of Bath and on down the young Avon, the burden of the years — the charms and excitements, the discoveries and disillusion, the short-lived loves, the months of loneliness and moments of success, and above all, the unmerciful background of doubt — fell one after another from my heart like dead leaves from a tree. I was left standing, stripped as it were for action, no longer considering the possibility of my country's defeat, absolutely sure of victory, not yet with the conviction of reason but with the more permanent certainty of faith.

Down in Somerset the family was waiting. The house was new to us, and my mother had a garden to show me and my father two trout dozing in the stream that ran through it. I walked strenuously on the plashy Mendips, then went to see my friends everywhere; my brothers at Oxford; my past at Cambridge, where men were still polite to men; new friends in Surrey; relations in Essex; a farm in Suffolk; a pub in Worcester, and had a freezing swim in the Severn. Gradually I assembled enough pieces to get a picture of war-time Britain. In Bristol, where the great hall of the University was a shell and the shopping centre so demolished that I could not buy a pair of trousers of which I was urgently in need, I think every-

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one of the half-million citizens had had some personal experience of bombs close at hand. The old woman who sold fruit had been dug out of the ruins of her shop ; the old gentleman in the bank had dealt with three incendiaries. My male friends kept cropping up as captains and majors ; their sisters were in uniform too. Everybody, in trains and buses and pubs and college halls, was serenely certain that we should win, that we had passed the worst (so we had perhaps, but how did they know that in the spring of 1941 ?), and the only matter which caused acrimonious debate was the question what we should do with the Germans after the war. I was even taken along to an otherwise very distinguished gathering of potentates in St. James's Square to discuss post-war policy in the Far East. I could see a little of the suffering there had been, and still was (the bombers hovered over us on many nights, headed for Bristol or South Wales, or, when I was in Surrey, for London and the Café Royal), and it seemed to me that the Luftwaffe must have come very near breaching the wall of English courage. Nobody can be unafraid when the bombs are actually falling ; the question is whether the defenders can build up their walls anew quicker than the attacks can break them down. It seemed as if it was only the great resilience of this extraordinary people, the incredibly short time they needed after sustaining frightful experiences before they were ready to face the same again, that saved them and the world.

It was time I got myself personally involved. At the recruiting office an old gentleman in blue put his finger-tips together and said, " So you want to go up in the air ! " The Medical Board, faithful to its kind to the last, finding nothing else wrong, declared I was too tall to be a pilot (at six feet one inch) and so I went in as an observer. Finally, in the autumn of 1941 my remustering as pilot " came through ", handsomely ante-dated. Given ten minutes to choose, I elected to be trained overseas, and in November I was saying farewell again to Britain in rain and mist at that depressing village of Gourcock we had greeted so gladly eight and a half months before.

I do not suppose my training was in any substantial degree different from that of the thousands of others who were being taught first to fly and then to kill in 1942. My journey to South Africa was rather different as an airman from my journey

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cities and factories and mines are there, but they can at least be allowed, and encouraged, to live with a little more dignity. The fact is that no country where the majority is dominated by a minority, whatever the racial characteristics of the inhabitants, is altogether a happy land. And heaven knows, the South Africans of European descent have enough strife and dissension amongst themselves.

My next journey was to Cairo, as an officer this time, but only just. More evidences of the degrading effect of Western urban life on coloured peoples. More loafing about, final training as a fighter pilot, then the worst loaf of all, months in the North African summer among the sand and flies and undreamed-of heat, waiting our turn. Then suddenly, at short notice, the long hop across the sea to Sicily, to Europe again, to a squadron at last. A drive for two days in convoy around the orchard slopes of Etna to our new aerodrome in the North. The painful emotion of passing utterly shattered towns, where the people cheered wildly (how do monarchs refrain from tears?) and the men threw biscuits to the innumerable children smiling up at them from the ruins. Flying over Salerno while men died in hundreds on the beaches; our first victory, when a flight-commander killed a Messerschmitt, and our first casualty, when the same pilot was burned suddenly to death before our eyes. Landing in Italy, too early for comfort, with our guns behind us and the Germans in front, shells landing a few yards from our cookhouse, bombs among the aeroplanes; lying under apple trees at night, watching the fireflies of the light Ack-Ack speeding upwards after a sound; little clutches of naval shells sailing slowly, slowly across the black sky; taking cover in a ditch and being driven back to bed by the mosquitoes. An afternoon in the lovely scenery near Amalfi, a night in Naples, foraging expeditions in search of good wine. We English felt bitterly about the Italians, especially in areas where we were sent for a rest, where they knew nothing about the war and treated us with indifference or condescension — even hostility would have been more acceptable, but in spite of our continuous grouching we never treated them harshly. I think we should have, but I am glad we did not. It was good to feel we were facing homeward, that each advance was bringing us nearer London via Berlin, and it was a blow when

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we were told one afternoon that we were needed elsewhere.

So here we are, sitting at "readiness" day after day on the frontiers of Burma. I feel it is a privilege, almost a pleasure, to be fighting the Japanese. The world has seen their amiability in weakness and their bestiality in strength; there is no place on this earth for a people who have no compassion, no spark of generosity in triumph on which to build goodwill in the future. Soon perhaps we shall be in China — already I see Chinese officers on all sides and hear every accent from Shantung to Kunming. Sooner or later we shall beat the Japanese; what of China then?

I believe that of all the Allies, in the Old World at least, China has lost least and stands to gain most. I do not mean materially: the death-roll of China is enormous, and her industries are destroyed. But after all, the industrial plants were but the top-dressing of China's commerce, whose true wealth, colossal, uncounted, unimagined, lies not in tall chimneys and whirling machinery but in the indefatigable deft fingers of her innumerable peasants and artisans, and in the abundant produce that springs blithely from her cosmic fields. These she cannot lose, and her gain is in the growth of unity and self-consciousness as one people; not an historical unity, founded on tradition and race rather than practice and politics, but the contemporary, twentieth-century nationhood of a competent individual component of the human world.

One thing the Chinese must learn: the abnegation of self that has been the basis of successful administration since Plato and Socrates defined their Utopia. The Chinese intelligentsia, numerically still small, contains the most charming people in the world. Their manners and taste are unequalled, their intellect unsurpassed. But is it an accepted thing among them that education and power are not assets alone but responsibilities? How many European soldiers, to mention one aspect, have not said, "Give me Chinese men and my own officers, and I will produce the best army in the world"? I have said, or implied, that the great mass of Chinese people hung back from military service; I believe that, on good evidence, to be a fact, and I believe the reason to lie, not in cowardice or lack of patriotism, but in the fear of being betrayed. It is so universally accepted in China that office (even Army rank) is a

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means to personal aggrandisement. If I did not condemn my cook for taking a 10 per cent profit, or "squeeze", on all his purchases on my behalf, it was because I knew he considered it a right and proper thing to do; and this idea of "perquisites" extends through every grade of public and private life in China. The Chinese are human: who will fight when he feels himself exploited for another's gain?

It is not easy to have a "clean-up" during a war — all the warring governments are enduring abuses in their countries for the sake of speed and smooth running. We all know that the British are paying a price for their arms higher than necessary because of the shameful machinations of certain industrialists in the evasion of tax. And can America be free from corruption and profiteers? Speed is always wasteful, and war gives no respite for repairs.

But after the war, Chiang and his Chinese have their chance. We British in our civil and Imperial services have something from which they can learn. It should not be hard. Incorruptibility and benevolence have been as prominent in the Chinese national legend as they have been rare in her political history. Education will be needed, and example: the Chinese people, with their active but misguided conscience and their ready acceptance of ideals, will do the rest. Make the ideal of service a household word, make it an honoured thing for a Chinese official to work hard and die poor; engender public trust through private shame, and I do not see how anything can prevent the Chinese inheriting the earth in the fullness of time. Nor can I think of any people more worthy.



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